PERIL PRESS presents:

MR. WONG

THE FAMOUS EXPLOITS OF DETECTIVE JAMES LEE

COMPLETE COLLECTION

Vol. 1 1934–35

6 MYSTERIES

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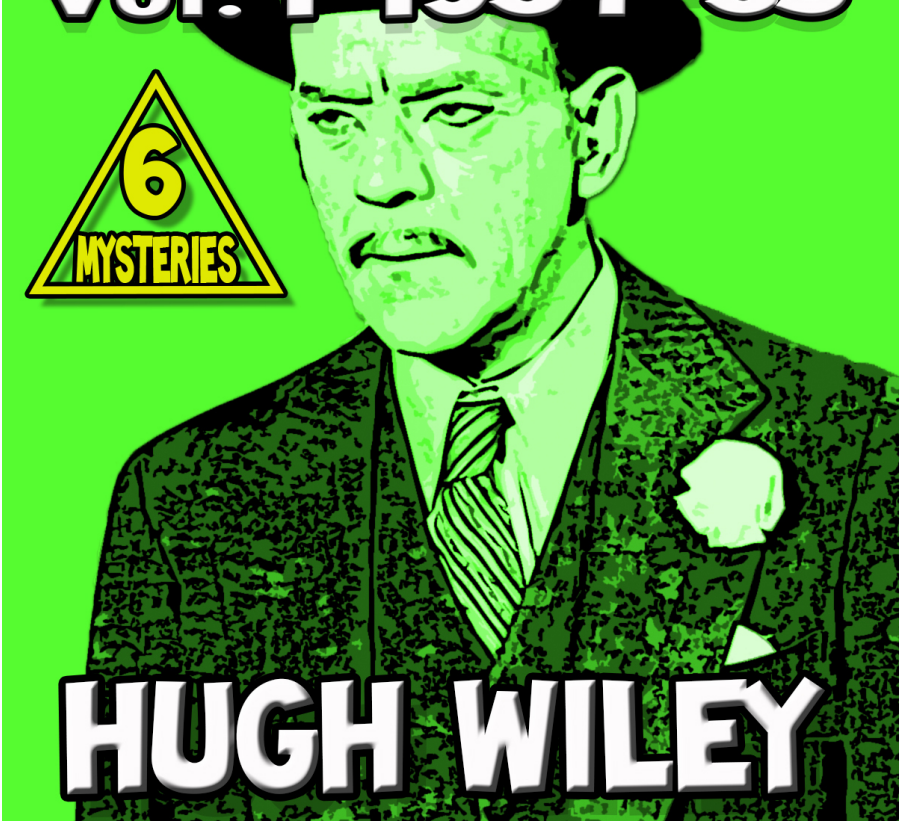

HUGH WILEY

PERIL PRESS presents:

Collier's, March 10 1934

MEDIUM WELL DONE

by Hugh Wiley

Collier's, June 30, 1934

IN CHINATOWN

by Hugh Wiley

Collier's, July 28 1934

THE THIRTY THOUSAND DOLLAR BOMB

by Hugh Wiley

Collier's, August 4 1934

TEN BELLS

by Hugh Wiley

Collier's, December 15 1934

LONG CHANCE

by Hugh Wiley

Collier's, May 25 1935

A RAY OF LIGHT

by Hugh Wiley

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C ollier's , March 10 1934

Mr. Wong:

MEDIUM WELL DONE

A James Lee detective story—

by Hugh Wiley

Illustrated by John Gannam

A romance of a city where, as Wong Sung the cook tells his friends, the gods of Justice have strange ways

AN HOUR before dinner Helen King walked into Wong Sung's kitchen.

“No dinner tonight,” she said. “I'm dining out.”

“You papa not come home?”

“He's delayed two days.”

“More better you bring eprybody here for dinner. Large turkey.”

“I'm dining out. Everybody will be here for cocktails.”

Wong Sung blinked his eyes at the thought of the wasted turkey. “Who am I to question the will of Heaven?” To Helen King, “You papa all right?” he asked.

“He seemed to be. Bring a lot of ice and everything for some old-fashioned cocktails. Mr. Blake likes that bourbon out of the old barrel.”

“I fix eprything.”

Walter Blake, the first guest to arrive, devoted sixty seconds to telling Helen King how beautiful she was and then, taking his cue from her mildly disinterested expression, he finished his greeting with a second one-way kiss that seemed to lack terminal facilities. All right. Such was the life of an arctic explorer. Something on her mind.

“Where does it seem to pain you the most—and what is it?”

“Sorry, darling.” Helen King smiled warmly at Walter Blake and the arctic chill melted to an equatorial temperature. “I'm disappointed. Dad telephoned from Houston that he wouldn't get to San Francisco until Thursday. He's flying to Los Angeles tonight.”

“More oil wells?”

“I guess so. He said something about another million-dollar Christmas present for me.”

“It's tough to be rich! How about mixing one before the rest of the mob arrives?”

“Hop to it. I can use an old-fashioned to beat the band. Maybe two or three of them! Darling—I wish you'd run the show tonight. I want to dance. Do you want to telephone Sam out at Tait's that we'll be there?”

“We'll be there with bells on! Tait's has a new name, you know—they call it the Edgewater Beach Club.”

“It will always be Tait's to me—until they change the moonlight and the surf—and Sam.”

Here was a cryptic signal, understood by two young people. It resulted in a clinch. Coming out of it, “There never was a night like that,” Walter Blake said wistfully. “Why can't we be married right away?”

“Please mix the cocktails. Wipe the rouge off your lips. You look silly.... There goes the bell. Mix a string of them. We have some more customers.”

Helen King's guests gave the demon rum a brief run for his money, and then, pleased with the idea of dancing through dinner, eight of the party voted yes on the Edgewater Beach Club proposal.

“There will be ten in our party,” Walter Blake said, telephoning the club to confirm his reservation.

By eleven o'clock Helen King's guests had satisfied their appetites for food and drink and had danced until, in spite of the excellent orchestra, half of them elected to seek some greener field of pleasure.

Helen King nodded a quick acquiescence to a suggestion that the party seek a new port of call. She turned to Walter Blake in time to interrupt a burst of economics that he was orating into the cute ears of Jane Westlake.

“The quickest way to discover what will happen in Washington is to consult a fortune teller. Nobody knows exactly what...”

From across the table a green-eyed brunette charted the course for the next leg of the voyage.

“That idea hooks me! There's a woman down on the Marina that everybody is perfectly mad about. She's a Russian. She isn't a fortune teller, exactly, but she has the queerest place. Charlie Bent told me about her.”

“What's her name?”

“Her name is Rousseau—Olga Rousseau. She's in the phone book. I'll tell her we'll all be down. She won't even ask who's in the party but I'll bet she'll know our names!”

The eyes of the blond girl seated beside Walter Blake widened with delight. “How do you suppose she does it?”

“Let's find out,” Blake suggested. Turning to Helen King, “Shall we take a whirl at this mysterious Rousseau bet, darling?”

“Of course! Everybody seems to like the idea. Let's go!”

Within three minutes after the green-eyed brunette had telephoned Olga Rousseau, a feminine voice rang through to the Edgewater Beach Club.

“What guests are included in that party of ten just leaving? I want the information for the society page of the Chronicle.”

When the information had been given Olga Rousseau hung up her telephone and devoted the next eight minutes to research relative to Helen King.

“Concentrate on her, Lily; the rest of them aren't important,” she said to a Negro woman. “I know enough about three of them to take care of everything. This looks like easy money.”

Lily, the Negro woman, smiled. “Catch 'em young,” she agreed, diving into the personal data section of Olga Rousseau's elaborate reference library. “Where will you receive them?”

“In the small parlor. Turn on about four lights—the pink ones. Rig Little Starlight for the preliminary and bring her in with a dash of thin violin and a spot of baby voice here and there.”

Without looking up from the pages of a book from whose text she was recording brief extracts in clean and beautiful shorthand.

“Thank God for that radio rig,” Lily said. “It never gets sore throat right when you need a baby voice.”

“Go easy with it,” Olga Rousseau admonished. “Let the kid chirp three or four times and then I'll rig the play as I go along. Don't go too heavy on the dramatics when you wake me up. These people are foxy eggs.... This Marshall King money is the biggest bet we've played since the Detroit cleanup.”

LEAVING his disappointed turkey cooling under a dish towel, Wong Sung rode the Washington Street cable car down toward Chinatown an hour after Helen King had left her house. In the Grant Avenue colony of his countrymen, Wong Sung invested in a ten-cent lottery ticket for the nine o'clock drawing. Thereafter, until the gods of Luck might smile upon his investment with benevolent humor, or frown upon it, Wong Sung regaled himself with two cups of potent black brandy. He drank the first one for therapeutic purposes. He lifted the second cup of liquor in a ceremonial gesture aimed at

complimenting a Chinese visitor, who at the moment was a guest of the Cave of Harmony. This club, whose membership included fifty members of the Wong family, counted this visitor, James Lee Wong, as its most distinguished cousin.

To his countrymen James Lee Wong was a member of the Wong family justly entitled to all the social advantages of the name, but to the public at large and on the federal pay rolls, the guest in the Cave of Harmony was more simply James Lee. Just now it appeared that Mr. Lee was interested in discovering the agency through which an important shipment of opium had been landed in San Francisco.

Mr. Lee spoke freely and without reserve. His companions were equally voluble in discussing the problem, so that within the hour three leads had been developed that promised to uncover enough evidence to convict a principal and two of his assistants in the affair.

From this interesting assemblage, at five minutes after nine, Wong Sung withdrew to have a look at the luck that his lottery ticket had brought. He discovered that his ten-cent investment was a total loss. “Fortunes are built on diligent labor,” he reflected. “Hola! The eyes of the blind need no ointment.” He returned forthwith to his master's house to enjoy the gift of sleep.

SPEAKING to Helen King and her companions through the lips of Olga Rousseau, Little Starlight lingered for a while on the topography and the flora of the spiritual world. Following this she related more specifically the details of her recent meeting with Mark Twain and Benjamin Franklin. The climate of the spirit plane, comparable in some respects to that of California, engaged her for a moment and then, remarkably technical for an Indian maiden, she favored her earth friends with the architectural details of a white marble structure whose iridescent floor glowed with the soft colors of a precious pearl:

“The marble temple is half hidden with rose vines. Spirits walk through its corridors. In the center of the great hall there is something draped with laurel and great wreaths, wreaths of red flowers. I do not know—Yes! It is the spirit world ceremony for an earth visitor!

“The red flowers cover the earthling's casket. There is beautiful music. The earth man is awaking. I see him. He is tall and slim. He has a lovely face. Gray hair. He is quiet and dignified and now he rises from his casket. He seems to recognize a lot of spirits who were friends of his on earth. They greet him joyously. They are taking him on a tour of the spirit world. The music is growing fainter.... I cannot hear it now. It is getting cold. I am going to...”

Interrupting Little Starlight, “What is the earth man's name who just arrived in the spirit world?” Walter Blake asked.

“I heard them speak his name,” Starlight answered. “I cannot tell you. It would bring you pain and give you fear. Goodbye, beloved friends of earth. I will speak with you again. Little Starlight loves you.”

With the definite object of shaking Helen King out of her wide-eyed mood, “Adios, Little Starlight,” Walter Blake said abruptly. “So long, kid. We'll be seeing you.”

At this, struggling out of the seeming trance that had rendered her rigid, Olga Rousseau fell sideways from her chair. Blake picked her up. The woman, heavy in his arms, looked up at him in bewilderment.

“Someone frightened Little Starlight,” she said tearfully. “Oh, I am so tired!”

“Who is Little Starlight?” Blake asked.

“Please do not bother me with questions! I am utterly exhausted.” From the couch on which Blake had laid her, Olga Rousseau smiled toward her guests. “I am sorry,” she whispered.

“We'll be running along now. Thank you ever so much. A most interesting experience,” Blake said.

Halting a moment beside her hostess, “I think you were perfectly wonderful,” Helen King added. “The children's voices were so sweet!”

Olga Rousseau smiled at Helen King. “I'll see you soon again, my dear,” she said.

AT VAN NESS AVENUE, two middle-aged, leather-lunged newsboys were bellowing an extra. Walter Blake stopped his car and bought a copy of the Chronicle. Across the top of the paper, “PLANE CRASH KILLS THREE,” he read. “California Oil Man, Pilot, Secretary, Die in Take-Off at Houston Field.” Blake flashed one look at the leading paragraph that followed and then to Helen King, “The Arabs are at it again,” he lied. “That was a wasted nickel.” He stuffed the newspaper into his coat pocket and drove Helen King to her residence.

When the girl was safe in the living room of her house, Blake excused himself on the pretext of digging up a highball. He went to the telephone in Wong Sung's kitchen and put through a call to the Houston airport. When he had verified the newspaper report of the accident he called the physician who had attended Helen King through her various minor illnesses.

“This is Walter Blake speaking. I am calling from Marshall King's residence. Mr. King was killed in an airplane crash two hours ago. I haven't told Helen about it yet.... Will you telephone for a nurse?... Yes, I'll break the news to her now.”

ELEVEN days after Marshall King's funeral, Helen King called alone at Olga Rousseau's house. She left the place within the hour and her eyes which had been dull with sorrow were shining now with the false light of some new hope that she had derived from her conference with Olga Rousseau.

Before Helen King had reached her own home after this visit, Olga Rousseau put through a call to Chicago for the proprietor of the Sterling Gold Finance Company.

“You tell The Kick to start for 'Frisco right away,” she said. “The Kick—not the Kid. Kick Konrad, you big tin ear.... What do I care if he's at work on a job! Tell him I said to drop it and head west! That's all, Andy. Goodbye!”

Olga Rousseau hung up the telephone and turned to Lily who stood beside her. “Konrad always was a fool,” she commented. “From what Andy said he's messing around with another kidnapping job. That bird will get his neck stretched yet.”

“He never had any brains of his own,” Lily agreed. “When do you expect him?”

“Four days from now or I'll see that he burns.”

“What are you going to do when he gets here?”

“Plenty! Your job right now is to get a line on Marshall King's voice. Your best lead is to mix up with the Pullman boys. He used to ride The Lark from here to Los Angeles a lot.”

“I've got his voice. It had a Middle-Western whang to it that got husky after he had three or four drinks. Soft Tennessee 'r,' and always keyed low. He never talked loud in the pinches.”

“A man worth fifty million dollars doesn't have to talk loud. Where did you get the dope?”

“I was out last night with a chauffeur that drove him for eight years. Incidentally, I picked up the song Mr. King used to sing when he was doing a little drinking, or a little thinking, or when he was just plain happy. It is unusual enough to be convincing.”

“You get the music?”

“Listen, honey!” In a rich, low voice Lily sang:

“'He always did the best he could,

He always said that he would try;

And so this little caterpillar,

He became a butterfly.'

“That was one of them. His sentimental song was that Sweet Rest

thing:

"'On the other side of Jordan,

In the green fields of Eden,

Where the Tree of Life is blooming,

There is sweet rest for me.'"

"That's good work. Post The Kick on the music. That Jordan thing has a pull to it."

"Are you going to work The Kick as soon as he comes, Miss Olga?"

"Not by a long shot! We'll save him for the big play. Lily, unless I'm a sap, we'll be ready to pull the blow-off after the beautiful Helen gets three or four more loads of Little Starlight stuff."

"BUT, DARLING," Walter Blake protested, "there is nothing supernatural about that Rousseau woman! Look at the thing calmly and rationally."

Staring at Blake, speaking in a voice without emotion, "I believe in her," Helen King said. Her eyes were soft with tears.

Blake realized the futility of argument.

"Maybe you'd be happier if Jane Westlake or Louise or some one of the older women lived here with you for a while. It's too big a house. You shouldn't live alone. Maybe you ought to travel for a year. Why won't you marry me now that you need me? I hate to think of you alone through all these hours and..."

"Good night, darling," Helen King interrupted. "I'm not... quite alone." Quickly then, speaking to mask her statement, "Wong Sung is here. He's been a dear, the poor old thing."

WHEN Walter Blake had left the house, Wong Sung, the poor old thing, elected once more to intrude upon his sorrowing mistress.

"More better eprybody come here see you now," he suggested. "You likee I make large dinner, eprybody come?"

"Go to bed," Helen King answered, smiling forlornly at Wong Sung.

On this night, instead of obeying orders, Wong Sung waited for an hour and then, at eleven o'clock, he left the house for a quick visit to the Cave of Harmony on Grant Avenue. He was gratified at discovering James Lee present in the assembly.

"This is a fortunate moment for me," he said in his greeting to the younger man. "I desire to consult you relative to a matter that concerns the happiness of my mistress."

"You do me great honor," James Lee said, following the ritual of

right conduct. “How may I be of service to you?”

Wong Sung led the younger man to an inner room apart from the garrulous assemblage in the Cave of Harmony.

“With commendable filial devotion my mistress still permits herself to be torn by the claws of the demons of despair. She is a crushed flower. In her anguish she has sought assistance for her tortured spirit from an unworthy source.”

“What would you have me do?” James Lee asked.

“The man she loves seems powerless to help her,” Wong Sung answered. “Unless I am mistaken, she has been drugged with the nectar of spurious hope. Her will is broken, her reason seems to sleep. Even as an opium eater returns forever to the origin of his own hell, so has my mistress surrendered to a charlatan who gives her momentary release from the realities of her sorrow.”

“Who is this person from whom your mistress seeks the gift of peace? You say Miss King is to marry Walter Blake? Has Mr. Blake no knowledge of the affair? Has he done nothing?”

“What can he do? His methods and his weapons would conquer a tangible enemy. They are futile against a foe from the spirit world.”

James Lee nodded in quick decision. “I will help you,” he said. “I have engaged enemies from the spirit world before.”

Wong Sung bowed to his companion. “I cannot express my gratitude.”

FOUR DAYS after Kick Konrad landed in San Francisco, Little Starlight, with characteristic Indian courtesy, guided Marshall King through the pearly labyrinths of the spirit plane; then down to earth to where, in the little parlor of Olga Rousseau's house, Helen King sat waiting to hear her father's voice.

“The earth mists are cold,” Little Starlight protested. “It has been dark and chill since we left the radiant realm of the spirit plane. I am unhappy. I grieve in sympathy for the sorrowing spirit who is beside me. He was so recently an earthling that he has not yet forgotten all the cares he knew on the earth plane. I must return now to the radiant warmth of the spirit plane. I will leave my sorrowing companion. He will speak to you. Goodbye, beloved friends of earth. Little Starlight loves you.”

In the little parlor of Olga Rousseau's house thereafter for fifty seconds there was a tense silence. The silence was broken then by a faint moaning and a patter of incoherent, whispered words from Olga Rousseau's lips. Presently, more clearly, “I am trying.... I am striving to do your will,” Olga Rousseau whispered. “I cannot speak for you—

speak to us. You are here. Speak to us. You are torturing me—speak to us."

Helen King sat forward in her chair. The nails of her clenched hands bit deeply into the pink flesh of her palms. Then a voice spoke to her, faintly at first. Then, seeming to strengthen with the vibrant emotion of love, "Helen, Helen, my dearest Helen. My beloved daughter—I am so happy to be with you again."

"Your father speaks to you," Olga Rousseau whispered.

"Oh, Father, come to me! I want to see you. Come near me. Let me touch your hand!"

"I will come to you presently, my dear. I cannot visit you on the earth plane until every transgression, every sin, every fault of mine, is forgiven. I will come to you some day and hold your hand. But before that day my earth life must be purified. One earth spirit still doubts me. He thinks I injured him long years ago and where there is doubt we of the spirit plane cannot appear."

"What keeps you from me, Father? What is it that troubles you?"

"The barrier between us is a debt that I owe to an earth-ling who befriended me—a debt of gratitude and of money."

"Who is the man?"

"He is John Kellogg. He had faith in me in a moment of disaster. He loaned me money. I repaid the loan but he has never shared the profits of the first venture that was the foundation of my fortune. You were a little girl and you knew nothing of the source of my wealth, but from the money that John Kellogg loaned me I made my first fortune. In equity and fairness half of the profits from that venture should have gone to him. Until that debt is paid I cannot come to you."

"Where is this man? What sum do you owe him? Speak to me! Father, if you knew how I long to touch your hand just for a moment once again, these trifles would not keep you from me!"

Abandoning generalities, the spirit of Marshall King spoke in the specific terms of a bank president. The debt of gratitude could not be well defined but John Kellogg's share of the profits from the money that he had loaned Marshall King amounted to three hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Kellogg could be reached in care of the Sterling Gold Finance Company of Chicago. Having set forth this data the spirit of Marshall King retreated from a sudden chill blast that seemed to descend upon his section of the Happy Hunting Ground.

For a moment thereafter communications from the unseen world were relayed through Little Starlight, whose robust physique rendered

her immune to the rigors of the climate of the spirit land.

Little Starlight's voice faded out on a swelling melody from the vibrant strings of a muted violin. Then, pulling herself together with evident effort, Olga Rousseau blinked her eyes at Helen King and voiced a well-timed plea for help in a strained voice as she collapsed in a dead faint.

SET AGAINST a longer list of negative characteristics, the proprietor of the Sterling Gold Finance could rightfully lay claim to the virtues of punctuality and good judgment. Playing the game, he rang through from Chicago on long distance promptly at the appointed moment and spoke to Olga Rousseau.

"It came," he said. "A cashier's check for three hundred grand. What's the next move?"

"Hold out thirty grand for yourself and express the rest of it to me in currency."

"What's the next chapter?"

"You'll know when the time comes, Andy. Play your hand. Goodbye."

Olga Rousseau turned to face Lily and Kick Konrad. "So far, so good," she announced. "Little Starlight wins another bet. Andy has got the dough. He'll express the rebate in currency tonight."

Kick Konrad reached for a whisky bottle that sat on the table in front of him and poured himself a drink.

"That's swell work, Olga," he said. "Two hundred and seventy grand! In the bag without a struggle. Where are you two dames heading for after the pay-off?"

"We're not heading. Listen, you rat, this is pin money. If I can rope her into making a will we bump her off with a realistic suicide effect and the big play is good for a million apiece."

"As far as I'm concerned there won't be any big play. You know what happens to repeaters. When that coin gets here I blow!"

"You'll stick like a good dog or you'll burn!" Olga Rousseau delivered her ultimatum with a spice of emotion.

"Yes, indeed, you'll burn," Lily corroborated. "We'll tell you when school lets out. Git yourself rigged with a make-up for the big reunion scene. You'd rather be Marshall King in Heaven wouldn't you, than Kick Konrad in Hell?"

Kick took another drink. Then surrendering, "I'll ride," he said. "Where's them pictures of King? How do you want him to show? White robes?"

“White robes,” Lily confirmed, “and be careful not to burn yourself with the phosphorus.”

“We pull the big play in this dump?”

“Not by a mile and a half,” Olga Rousseau said. “The next act in this gold-bearing drama will be played in the King residence. And listen, Kick—if your travels take you up to the boudoir see that you keep your hooks off the sucker's jewelry! The spirits don't wear diamonds much in Heaven.”

DEPARTING from his accustomed routine, late on Thursday afternoon, Wong Sung devoted nearly an hour to sharpening his pet meat cleaver. Earlier in the day, emerging from the Cave of Harmony after a consultation with James Lee, old Wong Sung invested sixty cents in the purchase of a fine-grained carborundum stone. Now, working diligently, he developed a razor edge along the ten-inch blade of his favorite cleaver. Presently he noted to his disgust that the thinned metal had become a wire edge. When this fault had been corrected he sheathed the narrow blade of the cleaver in a little teakwood trough lined with cork and set about the business of preparing dinner for his mistress.

With the coffee that Wong Sung served to Helen King, “You may go out tonight,” the girl said. “I shall not need you. Nobody but Miss Rousseau is coming.”

“You no likee me stay I go see my cousin. Mister Blake not come see you?”

“Not tonight,” Helen King said. “He is busy in his office.”

“What for he no come?” Old Wong frowned at this evident neglect on the part of Walter Blake. “More better he come see you epry night. More better you get married. Allee time too much stay all alone. Allee time cry like small child. I think you very happy get married.”

Making appropriate allowance for the personal qualities of the old servant's advice, “Some day maybe I'll get married,” Helen King said slowly. For a moment there was a wistful smile on her lips and then, more directly, “If Miss Rousseau is still here when you return you need not come in to see us. We shall want nothing.”

AT NINE o'clock that night, twenty minutes after Olga Rousseau arrived, Helen King turned out all of the lights in the long living room. At Olga Rousseau's direction she locked the front door of the house and switched off all of the lights in the hallway except one.

“Sit here in this chair near me,” Olga Rousseau directed. “Help me with your own will. It will be very difficult.”

“I'll help you,” Helen King answered. “Maybe Little Starlight will guide him to me.”

Olga Rousseau did not answer, for her body had suddenly gone rigid. There was a moment of silence after this and then, from an unseen source, Helen King distinctly heard the low, soft music of a violin playing the air that seemed to be Little Starlight's favorite. She heard a child's voice singing and then, in deeper tones, she heard her father's voice singing the well remembered words of his favorite song:

“On the other side of Jordan,

In the green fields of Eden,

Where the Tree of Life is blooming,

There is sweet rest for me.”

Impulsively, half rising from her chair, “Father, come to me!” Helen King whispered. “Come to me now!”

Marshall King's voice was low. “I am coming, my dear; I am happy now,” he said. “The error that barred me from the earth plane is no longer in my pathway. I am coming to you, my beloved child. It is dark.... It is dark here on the earth plane. The spirit world is so light and beautiful. It is dark and cold here in this shadowed vale.... Reach out your hand, my daughter. Guide me to your arms.”

Marshall King's voice seemed to come from the darkened doorway that opened into the entrance hall of the house. The tones of his voice increased in strength and then, trembling with the quick shock of surprise, through the wide eyes of fear, Helen King saw her father's figure entering the room. The returning spirit, clad in a luminous white robe, seemed to glide slowly toward. The girl saw that her father's face glowed with some faint unearthly light and that he seemed to smile at her.

“Here I am,” she said, rising from her chair.

“I am coming to you, my darling. It is dark, so dark here on the earth plane. Stretch out your hand.... The darkness deepens. I must take you with me to the world of light when I return.... I cannot see you. This earth is as dark as a tomb of death.”

Instantly, then, the dark room lightened. There was a click of an electric switch and Helen King saw the gliding apparition become violently animate. She heard a calm voice speaking:

“Stick 'em up, Konrad! Stay where you are, Rousseau.”

James Lee stood in the open door of the dining room. In his right hand Helen King saw a long, blue-barreled thirty-eight. The weapon was leveled at Olga Rousseau. Walter Blake stood back of James Lee. Helen King called to Blake, and then she fainted. In her last moment

of consciousness she observed the seven-foot leap made by her father's white-robed spirit.

In the entrance hall of the house there sounded a sudden chatter of guttural Chinese from the throat of old Wong Sung and an oath from Kick Konrad. The zipping impact of three blows of Wong Sung's cleaver followed. Hearing this James Lee, hardened as he was to violence, winced. He snapped a pair of handcuffs on Olga Rousseau's wrists. Leaving her under Walter Blake's guard, he walked into the hallway of the house. He saw old Wong Sung standing above a prostrate white-robed figure. The older Chinese raised his eyes and smiled at his countryman.

"I ketchum," he said to James Lee, and in his tone there sounded the mild pride of a modest victor.

James Lee stooped and laid his fingers on Kick Konrad's wrist. "You caught him plenty!" he said to old Wong Sung. "He's dead."

Accepting this manifestation of the will of Heaven, Wong Sung blinked his eyes.

"Large man die small fashion," he suggested. "Killum very easy."

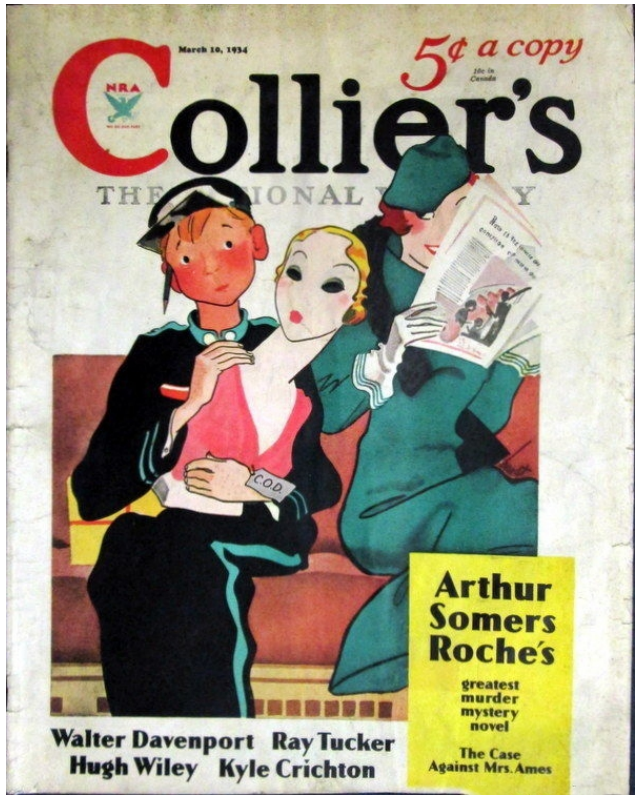
IN HIS report over long distance to his chief in the Department of Justice, "We got the Rousseau woman and Lily Lincoln, her Negro assistant," James Lee said. "We recovered all the money that had been taken from Miss King. Operative Miller arrested Andy Smallmann in Chicago. He was Rousseau's agent. Anton Konrad resisted arrest. It became necessary for my assistant in the case, Wong Sung, to use force in making the capture. Wong Sung is entitled to half of the reward for this criminal.... No. He hit him in the head with a meat cleaver."

That night in the Cave of Harmony there was a nine-course banquet. At the head of the banquet board, host to twenty of his admiring countrymen, Wong Sung related his version of the King-Rousseau case.

"Imagine my surprise to discover that the gods of Justice had placed a keen-edged weapon in my hand at the very moment that I needed something of the kind to sever the tentacles of the octopus that had fastened upon my mistress!"

"A wise man understands a nod," one of the guests suggested.

"Aye!" old Wong Sung agreed. "How great a blessing is clear perception!"



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C ollier's , June 30, 1934

IN CHINATOWN

by Hugh Wiley

Illustrated by John Gannam

Wherein the suave James Lee Wong, under-cover man, encounters a murder mystery, and overlooks the evidence in favor of a quiet little talk—

In Chinatown. At the heart of the mystery. Page 12.

THE telephone records show that at 8:15 in the morning long-distance rang through from San Francisco to Sunnymount with a call from Olga Saratov to Frank Russell.

Sunnymount is thirty miles south of San Francisco. There was a five-minute hitch in the long-distance call and this was due to the fact that Frank Russell's telephone was an unlisted number. Presently, the Palo Alto supervisor rigged things up so that Mr. Russell received Olga Sartov's call.

"I want to see you as soon as you can get here," the Russian woman said.

"Olga! I am delighted to hear your voice. Where are you? When did you get to San Francisco?"

"I have an apartment at 9900 Pacific Street," Olga Saratov said. "Apartment seven. When can you get here? Is Hans Ritter still a friend of yours?"

"Not later than ten," Mr. Russell said. "Hans is still a pal of mine. I will start as soon as I get dressed."

"You're not dressed?"

"Just getting up. I'll be there at ten."

Mr. Russell had promised himself the rare luxury of staying in bed until noon. On the bed, at his right between him and the teakwood stand on which the telephone stood, there lay an accumulation of reading matter. Two numbers of the China Journal curled about a flat number of Antiquity. The third quarterly issue of the American Geographical Review lay above Egypt As a Field for Anthropological Reasarch. Under these was a catalogue of ancient Chinese porcelain and then, in the lower strata, consecutively came Goddard's Kate Texts. a monograph on Korean mortuary pottery. Edwin Barber's Tulip Ware of the Pennsylvania-German Potters, three book auction catalogues of the Anderson Galleries in New York, and a much worn copy of South

Wind.

The morning mail had come in and to the left of the literature there lay an assortment of letters that Mr. Russell's Japanese cook had brought up with his breakfast tray.

Dressing, "What a fool I am." the writer reflected. "Why should I have to doll myself up and drive to San Francisco at this moment? . . . Why is it that something always gums up the game with a lot of female visiting firemen!"

HE WAS sorry then for these unkind thought. "Olga is a good egg, he said to himself, whamming a razor blade through a two day's growth of beard. "I shouldn't be such a selfish pig. Maybe she really needs me. She sounded serious enough. . . I wonder what she wants with Hans Ritter."

When he had dressed, "I will be gone all day," he said to his Japanese cook. "I'll probably have dinner in San Francisco and be back late tonight or tomorrow morning."

A frown of disappointment lay on the face of the Japanese servant. "Berry fine ramb kidneys."

"Eat them yourself," Mr. Russell directed. "Lamb kidneys get nephritis in the tepid atmosphere in that refrigerator.

You'd better get the ice off the coils of that machine before it becomes a hothouse."

"Berry fine ramb kidneys," the Japanese insisted.

Russell got into his car. He looked at his watch. The time was 9:15. The lights were against him at six crossings en route to San Francisco; a funeral had the traffic stopped at the cemeteries; a construction crew blockaded him at Colma, but he landed in front of Olga Saratov's residence at 9:55. He looked at his watch again. He realized that he must have broken various traffic regulations.

"Forty minutes! That's not bad time through that traffic. . . . I shouldn't drive so fast. . . . I wonder what Olga wants."

He got out of his car. He locked the ignition and put the key in his left-hand vest pocket alongside of the thin watch that he carried. "She sounded sort of Sarah Bernhardt. I hope she hasn't had a relapse of love's young dream."

He walked into the entrance of the apartment house and fumbled around with the cryptic mechanism of pushbuttons and the concealed telephones with which such places are equipped.

He pressed the button opposite Olga Saratov's name. Ten seconds later the buzzing mechanism of the lock in the front door sounded as a signal for his entrance. He walked through the doorway and made his way to the elevator, wherein, guessing at the mathematics of apartment house numbers, he jabbed button Number Seven. When he had escaped from the elevator he found himself in an entrance hall from which, save for the elevator, there was but one exit. He pressed the button in the framing of the door.

WHEN the door opened Mr. Russell faced a Chinese cook who had left his service three cooks back. The cook's name was Wong Lok. Following Wong Lok there had been a female refugee from Poland who had lasted ten days.

The female refugee had given place to Sugi Matsuta. Mr. Matsuta, leaving suddenly for Japan after two years' service, had replaced himself with one of his countrymen who was the present incumbent. Of these various servants Wong Lok was the best cook and Sugi Matsuta the most generally efficient servant.

The wide vestibule of Olga Saratov's apartment narrowed to a hallway which led back to a dining-room. A five-foot doorway in the left wall opened upon a long living-room. Mr. Russell got a flash of this layout but in his surprise at meeting Wong Lok his survey of the scene was recorded without much attention to detail.

He held out his hand to his former Chinese cook. "What are you doing here?" he said. "When did you come back from China?"

Smiling only with his mouth, "How you, Mis' Russell?" Wong Lok asked, speaking coolie pidgin. "Long time no see you. You ketchum large story?"

Answering this with another question, "What are you doing here?" Mr. Russell asked. "Are you working for Miss Saratov?"

"I cookum lilly bit," Wong Lok answered.

"You likee talk lady? She sit down in sun porch. You go through large room you see him." Wong Lok bowed and with a gesture of his right hand he indicated the route through the wide living-room along which Mr. Russell would travel to find Miss Saratov.

Wong Lok put Mr. Russell's hat on a table against the east wall and with a pleasant nod toward his former master he turned and walked down the hallway.

Midway of the living-room Mr. Russel announced himself with a casual call to Olga Saratov. "Olga! Hello, globetrotter. Where are you?"

There was no reply to this. Ten feet farther along his route, looking into the Inspector Coyne gave one look at Olga Saratov. "Telephone the coroner's office," he said to one of the policemen who had accompanied him colorful interior of the sunporch, Mr. Russell saw Olga Saratov. She was lying in a long wicker chair. Her head, resting on a yellow cushion, lay so that her face was turned toward the streaming sunlight. Russell called to her again. "Olga, my dear! It's good to—" he began, and then he saw against the yellow surface of the cushion under her head a blackening stain of blood. A stream of blood had flowed from her shoulder to the finger tips of her right hand, widening to a ten-inch pool where her fingers touched the green carpet.

Mr. Russell halted. "Olga!" he said.

Then, seeming to lack breath enough to speak her name aloud, "Olga," he whispered. . . . "She's dead!"

Over the telephone to police headquarters:

"A woman has been killed," Mr. Russell reported. "9900 Pacific Street,

Apartment Seven. . . . My name is Prank Russell."

"What's the woman's name?"

"Her name is Olga Saratov."

"How do you know she was killed?"

Mr. Russell was conscious of a sudden flash of anger. Without answering the question, "Hurry up," he said. "I'll be here when your men arrive."

He hung up the telephone and called loudly for Wong Lok. No voice answered him. He explored the kitchen of the apartment and the three bedrooms.

Wong Lok had disappeared.

INSPECTOR COYNE of the homicide squad gave one look at Olga Saratov.

"Telephone the coroner's office," he said to one of the policemen who had accompanied him. To Russell, "How long have you been here?"

"Not over twenty minutes."

"Who let you in?"

"A Chinaman. A Chinaman named Wong Lok. He used to work for me."

"Did you know the dead woman?"

"I've known her for ten years."

"Where's the Chinaman?"

"He must have left right after I arrived. As soon as I saw what had happened I looked for him."

"Why did you hide the gun?"

Russell felt the blood surging through the veins in his throat. "What gun are you talking about? Inspector, I don't like that question!"

"Show him the gun, Casey."

Officer Casey produced a .45 automatic.

"This was lying under the rug over by that chair," Inspector Coyne explained.

"Why did you hide it?"

"I never saw the gun before."

"Why don't you want the dead woman to be booked as a suicide?"

"She isn't a suicide. She was murdered."

Inspector Coyne smiled thinly at Russell.

“I think so too. You’d better come down to headquarters with us, Mr. Russell.”

“I’ll drive down right away. My car is out in front of the house.”

“One of the boys will bring it down. You’d better ride along with me.”

AT HEADQUARTERS Inspector Coyne held his fire on the problem of booking Frank Russell. “The woman had quit bleeding by the time we got there,” he explained to the chief of the homicide squad. “If Russell is telling the truth she was killed half an hour or so before he showed up. She telephoned him at 8:15. He could have been there at nine o’clock.”

“What’s the Chinaman angle sound like to you?”

“She’s had a Chinese cook for a couple of weeks.”

“Round him up.”

“We’re working on it.”

“What about the gun?”

A clerk from the telegraph room came in with a wire that contained some interesting data on the gun. He handed the message to Inspector Coyne.

“I’m not a bad guesser,” the inspector said when he had read the message.

“The Army people identify the gun from the serial number. It was issued to Captain Frank Russell in San Francisco a week before his outfit started for France in 1917. It’s still his gun.”

“That makes it tough for Frank Russell. We’ll book him ‘en route’ until the district attorney can do his stuff. Get Russell in here.”

Facing Inspector Coyne and three other members of the homicide squad, Frank Russell realized that he confronted a new menace. Inspector Coyne showed him the .45 automatic. “This is the gun that was used to kill the woman. The bullet that killed her was fired through the barrel of this gun. You told me you’d never seen the gun before, didn’t you?”

“To the best of my knowledge I never saw the gun before.”

“It was issued to you in 1917 when you went to France. Think it over. . . . That’s all, Russell. You’ll have to stay here for a while. The charge will be first degree murder when the smoke clears away. Think it over.”

LEAVING Olga Saratov's Pacific Street apartment, Wong Lok headed for Chinatown. On Grant Avenue, near the corner of Jackson Street, in the heart of this colony of his countrymen, Wong Lok sought sanctuary in the Cave of Harmony.

The Chinatown squad and a few of the white and yellow public in general know the Cave of Harmony as a rendezvous wherein members of the Wong family meet to discuss their mutual affairs, to enjoy the glow that comes from libations of black brandy, and to seek spiritual or financial support whenever the frowns on the face of Milo Fo gum up the game of life. As a matter of fact, the Cave of Harmony is a more complex structure than the first view of the centi'al assembly room might suggest.

A system of twisted, narrow hallways, stairways leading upward to apartments above the street, stairways leading to subterranean apartments, telephones, an electric signal system, a treasure room, a properly ventilated opium room, a wine cellar and a barber shop are included as integral elements of the refuge to which Wong Lok hurried subsequent to his departure from Olga Saratov's apartment.

AFTER greeting the old sentinel on duty in the Cave of Harmony in the slow phrases of the ritual of Right Conduct, "I must speak at once with James Lee Wong," the refugee declared. "You have not seen me. I am not here."

The elder Chinese removed his spectacles and bowed to Wong Lok. "A wise man understands a nod," he said. "At the moment our friend is engaged. If you will rest in the Moon Cavern I will send him to you presently."

The Moon Cavern was an underground apartment lighted by a single forty-watt lamp. It was furnished with a table, three chairs, a mirror, a bed, a lithographed calendar that had been printed in Shanghai and a quotation board on which were recorded the international prices of silver, rice and silk.

Here, after a delay of forty minutes, James Lee Wong found his countryman.

"I am sorry I had to hold you up," the late arrival said, speaking in English. "What's the layout?"

James Lee Wong, known on the federal pay rolls as James Lee, sat down at the table in the Moon Cavern and lighted a cigarette. He was six feet tall, and from where he sat he could blow the smoke out over the head of Wong Lok. After the first drag at his cigarette he let a cloud of smoke drift through the thin nostrils of his aquiline nose. He

looked at Wong Lok through the narrowed level lids of his warm brown eyes. His face was suddenly the face of a foreign devil—a "Yankee."

Wong Lok sensed the fact that James Lee had masked his countenance. "The State Department has me jumping sideways on the Manchukuo afl'air," James Lee said. "I'm loaded down with work but what is one more stone to an overloaded donkey?" The glowing cigarette quivered in the long, sensitive fingers of James Lee's right hand. "What is your problem? I am a donkey who loves to have stones added to his burden by any member of the Wong clan."

After a moment, "This is a heavy stone," Wong Lok began. "First of all, the Russian woman is dead."

"Saratov?"

Wong Lok nodded. "Olga Saratov is dead. I have to stay under cover for a while. In the meantime the local police are holding Frank Russell for her murder. You remember, I worked for him down the peninsula while I was over here on those airplane purchases."

"I know him. His last two cooks have been Japanese Foreign Office men. What have the police got on him?"

"Plenty. The Russian woman was shot with his gun—the pistol he carried in the Army. They can prove that he was the last man who saw her alive."

"Where were you?"

Wong Lok's eyes narrowed. "Let us say that after I served her breakfast this morning I went out marketing."

"She had no other servants. If you were out how did Frank Russell get into her apartment?"

"The police assume that she let him in. They have an airtight case against him. They assume, perhaps, that I faded out in a cloud of fear —or discretion. They may think it was a lovers' quarrel."

James Lee smiled thinly at Wong Lok.

"You'd do well to stay faded out for a while," he suggested. "Why did Russell come to see Olga Saratov?"

"She invited him. She telephoned him this morning while I was removing her breakfast tray."

"What did she say?"

"She said, 'I want to see you as soon as you can get here.' Then she asked, 'Is Hans Ritter still a friend of yours?' Then she gave Russell her address."

“Had Hans Ritter been up to see her?”

“Not that I know of. I think she visited him at his office several times.”

“And had accomplished nothing?”

“I think she was about to accomplish—everything.”

JAMES LEE looked straight at Wong Lok for thirty seconds.

Presently, “I think we have the motive,” he said.

Wong Lok nodded. “We have the motive.” Then, after a moment, smiling broadly, “We have the motive,” Wong Lok repeated. “All we need now is—the man.”

“You would not like to hang at San Quentin?” James Lee inquired.

“ I prefer to live for a while yet,” Wong Lok answered. “You are busy in the service of the State Department—I too have quite a lot of work to do for my country.”

James Lee ground his cigarette into an ash tray that lay on the table.

“Where did Russell keep this gun that the police found? Did he carry it? Was it out in the open?”

“He kept it with the rest of his war stuff in a little army trunk that he had in France.”

“Was the trunk locked? Some of those locks aren’t so simple.”

“The trunk was locked but the key that opened it lay on top of his dresser in his bedroom. He had a lot of keys.

He carried three or four on his key ring, but there must have been fifty others in a copper tray on his dresser.”

James Lee lighted another cigarette.

“You know,” he said, “this is going to be a tough spot for you if Russell gets a lawyer with any brains.”

Wong Lok closed his eyes for a moment.

“This is a tough spot for me,”

he amended. Then, qualifying his statement, “ It’s a tough spot for me if Hans Ritter has sold out to the opposition.”

James Lee got to his feet. “I’ll see what I can do,” he promised. “Stay under cover. I’ll let you know what happens.”

AT THE Hall of Justice it required the impact of James Lee’s association with the federal Department of Justice to batter down the barrier that lay between Frank Russell and the outer world.

“They may hold you this way—incommunicado—for a week or so,”

James Lee informed Russell. “In the meantime if you will trust me perhaps I can help you.”

Russell scowled at his visitor. “Who are you?” he asked.

“I am James Lee Wong. For the moment let us say that I am a friend of a Chinese man who cooked for you—Wong Lok.”

“If you’re that killer’s friend I do not care to talk with you. Why did he murder Olga Saratov? Why did he steal my gun and frame me? The whole layout is clear enough to me. Get out of here. I don’t want to see you.”

Patiently, “Perhaps Wong Lok did not kill the woman,” James Lee suggested.

“He isn’t a killer. He was a classmate of mine at Yale. I don’t think he killed her. Maybe he was guarding her.”

“A hell of a job he made of it. It’s all too horrible. I don’t want to talk about it.”

“You have my deep sympathy. If you will forgive me, the police department has you convicted now. I would like to help you. I believe that you are innocent.”

“If you believe I am innocent, then get me a lawyer. This police outfit won’t even let me talk to—”

“They have permitted me to see you,”

James Lee said evenly. “If you will let me discuss your problem with you perhaps I can help you.”

“I’ll talk to no stool pigeons. I’ll give you a thousand dollars if you’ll get Morgan Lombardi in here to see me. He’s my lawyer.”

“There’s no charge against you yet. No one can see you unless—”

“It’s an outrage!” Russell fumed.

“It’s inhuman! It’s absolutely against the law to hold me this way.”

“So it is,” James Lee agreed. Then, quickly, “Tell me about Olga Saratov. How long have you known her? What were your common interests?”

Surrendering to the will of his inquisitor, “I have known her eight or ten years,” Russell said wearily. “I knew her first through our common interest in Scythian a r t and Han pottery. We explored some of the graves on the Kuban River together. We did some digging in Kansu—Neolithic stuff. She traveled a great deal. In the past five years I have seen her only two or three times. I quit traveling.”

“Why?”

“I got tired. I’ve stayed in California for the past six years. The only traveling I’ve done has been in the California gold country.”

“Scythian art. Neolithic China, Han pottery, jade—”

“How did you know about that?”

James Lee smiled. “I read your book on jade,” he said. “All of these things are diversions of yesterday. Is that true ?”

“They were yesterday’s hobbies,” Russell admitted. “California history has engaged me to the exclusion of every other interest.”

“Was Olga Saratov interested in California?”

“I was her friend. She saw California through my eyes.”

“Her own interest was awakened by no special scene—no single element of the California picture?”

After a moment, “The only California story that really interested her was the Red Mountain affair. She knew every angle of that web of fraud from start to finish.”

“Red Mountain—you mean the big cinnabar mine?”

Russell nodded. “Discovered a hundred years ago and still a big producer.”

Abruptly, “Is Hans Ritter a friend of yours?”

Russell’s eyes widened. “‘Of course he is a friend of mine. He’s the president of Cinnabar Limited. They own the Red Mountain properties. He is a good friend of mine. He turned over all the old Red Mountain records to me.”

“Did Olga Saratov know Hans Ritter?”

“She met him. I introduced him to her three years ago.”

“You really think that Ritter is a good friend of yours?”

“He was a good friend when I was digging into the Red Mountain records He’s more than a good friend now. He is one of the closest friends I have.”

“Cinnabar Limited controls nearly all the quicksilver mines in the United States, doesn’t it?”

“All the quicksilver in the United States and then some,” Russell answered.

“Cinnabar Limited is the biggest quicksilver outfit in the world.”

“After Wong Lok left your employ, Mr. Russell, who cooked for you?”

“Two or three cooks followed him. There was a Polish woman, and then there was a Japanese boy, Sugi Matsuta, and then—”

“HOW long did Matsuta work for you?”

“He worked for me two years or so. He went back to Japan. When he left me he got me another Japanese man—the one who works for me now.”

“Was Matsuta a good cook?”

“He was good at everything. His cooking was cosmopolitan in its flavor, to say the least.”

“Did that ever strike you as being a bit unusual?”

“Of course. I was in luck. There are lots of unusual cooks in the world. A friend of mine in Palo Alto has a Russian admiral cooking for him.”

“Do you ever hear from Sugi Matsuta?”

“I had one letter from him after he got back to Japan. I haven’t heard from him since then.”

“You may hear from him again within the next few days.” James Lee held out his hand to Frank Russell.

“I’ll see you again before long, Mr. Russell. This affair is less complex than you think. I know that you are under a frightful strain. It sounds a bit absurd—but for the next few hours let me do the worrying for you. Get some sleep.”

At this, conscious of a .sudden overwhelming undefined sense of relief,

“Who the hell are you?” Russell asked.

James Lee smiled at Russell. “Let us say that I am one of the Wong family,” he suggested.

Facing Hans Ritter, president of Cinnabar Limited, across the wide desk in the executive’s office, “I have called to discuss a problem that confronts a friend of yours,” James Lee announced directly after he had introduced himself to Ritter. “His name is Frank Russell. He is a friend of yours?”

“A pal of mine,” Ritter declared.

“What about him?”

“He’s in jail.”

“Jail! What’s he done?”

“He’s guilty of knowing Olga Saratov.”

“I don’t get you.”

“Pardon me. Of course you know Miss Saratov?”

Ritter's eyes narrowed. "I'm not supposed to know her. She was to—How does she come into the picture?"

"Olga Saratov was murdered this morning. The police are holding Frank Russell. They accuse him of the murder."

"Olga Saratov murdered! Why—she was to—Why do they think Frank did it?"

"Forgive me, Mr. Ritter. Will you complete your statement about Miss Saratov? She was to—what?"

"She was to meet me in this office at four o'clock this afternoon."

SHE is dead, Mr. Ritter. They are holding your friend Frank Russell for her murder."

"It's absurd! He's no more guilty than I am! What evidence have they?"

"There is some interesting evidence. Some of it is very embarrassing to Mr. Russell. Will you answer one question in strictest confidence?"

"What's the question?"

"Within the past month, Mr. Ritter, have you had any business contacts with a Japanese gentleman by the name of Sugi Matsuta?"

Hans Ritter hesitated a moment and then, "I'll answer your question. The answer is yes. What of it?"

For an instant two hard lines appeared at the corners of James Lee's mouth. "Thank you," he said. "It has been a sort of poker game—a race between Matsuta and Olga Saratov. Am I correct?"

"You're correct. But what has Frank Russell got to do with the game?"

"My guess is that Miss Saratov desired his aid—his friendly influence with you. Your company controls half of the world's supply of quicksilver. A war cannot be fought without quicksilver. Even a war chest has a bottom to it. Playing against Matsuta the lady was playing in a no-limit game."

James Lee smiled. Then, "Another player will take Miss Saratov's place in the game this afternoon," he said. "Mr. Ritter, the Russian government will have an authorized representative in your office at four o'clock this afternoon to complete Miss Saratov's work. It will probably be to your advantage, and to the world's advantage, to sign a contract with Russia for your quicksilver."

"Well, if it's of the slightest interest to you, I have decided to play ball with Russia."

James Lee reached for his hat. Rising, he held out his hand to Hans

Ritter. “Thank you,” he said. “As a minor consequence of your decision I think your friend Frank Russell will be out of jail before midnight. There appears to be an honorable suicide in Mr. Sugi Matsuta’s immediate future. I will do what I can to facilitate his departure from life.”

AT 5:20 Pacific Time Mr. Sugi Matsuta arrived at the Cave of Harmony. He was forcibly escorted by James Lee. In a secluded apartment in the Cave of Harmony, at James Lee’s dictation, Mr. Matsuta began to write his confession.

Writing in clear and beautiful English script, “This confession is written of my own free will,” he began. “I killed Olga Saratov. I shot her with a .4.5 caliber automatic pistol. The pistol belonged to Frank Russell, of Sunnymount, California. I obtained the weapon through one of my aides who is now employed by Mr. Russell.”

“I will permit you to say that theft was the motive for Miss Saratov’s murder,”

James Lee conceded. “It will clear your name in the records of your Foreign Office.”

Sugi Matsuta bowed to James Lee.

“I thank you,” he said. “You are very considerate.”

Thereafter, to the end of his confession, Mr. Matsuta continued writing in clear and beautiful script. Near the bottom of the page, “That, I think, is complete,” he said. He handed the unsigned document to James Lee.

The Chinese reached for a telephone that sat on the table in front of him. Into the instrument a moment later, “Send three men down here,” he ordered. “I want them to witness a signature. They must be citizens of the United States.” He hung up the telephone. From a long and narrow ebony box inlaid with gold that lay on the table at his left he removed a smaller box, an ancient lacquered affair wherein, wrapped in silk, there lay a Japanese dagger-sword.

With due ceremony James Lee passed the sword to Sugi Matsuta. The Japanese received it reverently in both hands, holding his palms upward. “I have permission to inspect the blade?”

James Lee bowed without speaking.

Slowly drawing the sword from its sheath, the Japanese inspected the steel inch by inch as it appeared. Following the ancient ritual he held the edge of the sword toward himself. When the point of the blade was nearly exposed, bowing again to James Lee, “May I inspect the point?” he asked. “Etiquette does not permit drawing a sword in the

house of a friend, even for hari-kari."

There was a quick light of enjoyment in Sugi Matsuta's eyes. "This is a jewel by Muramasa!" he said. "A *tanto* by Muramasa! Fourteenth century! I am not worthy of its blade. It is . . ."

Interrupting Sugi Matsuta's words, three men came into the room. Addressing them, "This gentleman is going on a long journey," James Lee announced. "Observe him while he signs that document on the table. Each of you will witness his signature."

AT 6:20 Pacific Time Frank Russell was released from the custody of the San Francisco police department. Inspector Coyne had accompanied James Lee to Frank Russell's cell.

Now, bidding farewell to Russell, the inspector looked admiringly at James Lee. "In all the records of the department there has never been a slicker piece of work!" the inspector said. "Never a slicker piece of work—nor a quicker piece of work! I'll have to hand it to you, Lee, for making a bull's-eye with your first shot."

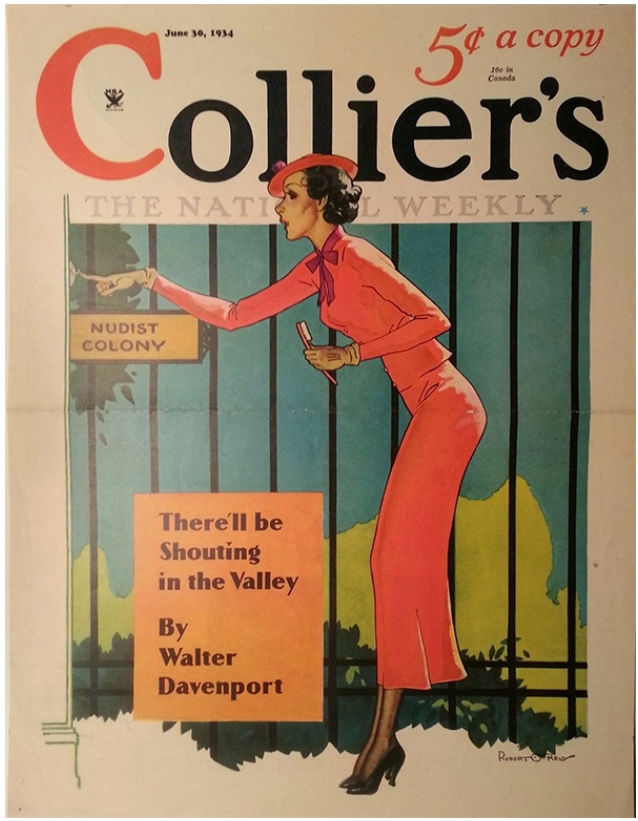
"Thank you very much. Inspector." James Lee smiled at the police officer. Then, to Prank Russell. "I have your car outside for you," he said. "Incidentally, I have taken the liberty of hiring a new cook for you Your Japanese servant found it necessary to leave your employ. Your new cook is a Chinese friend of mine. I hope that he will be satisfactory. Wong Lok has coached him a bit."

When they were alone, to James Lee, "I will not attempt to express my gratitude," Russell said. "I can't—"

"Thank you," James Lee said. "Let's call it a closed incident. The books are balanced."

"I can't understand why Matsuta—"

"Please do not try to understand Matsuta," James Lee suggested. "He was always too sure of himself. You know, Mr. Russell, sooner or later even a monkey falls out of a tree."



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C ollier's , July 28 1934

Mr. Wong:

THE THIRTY THOUSAND DOLLAR BOMB

A James Lee detective story—

by Hugh Wiley

Illustrated by Irving Nurick

A story of brilliant detection, not entirely devoid of romance, in which James Lee Wong, undercover man, finds that senators are human

James Lee turned to the last page. "This is very interesting," he said

James Lee turned to the last page. “This is very interesting,” he said.

STAYING over in the Palace Hotel in San Francisco for a week on his return from the Orient, Senator Colton of the Committee on Foreign Relations found time to indulge himself in a mysterious project for the good of the nation.

“Don't ask me any more questions and don't give me any more orders,” he said in the manner of a petulant child, addressing his confidential secretary, Sylvia Deane. “The way you talk, anybody would think I was a freshman up to his neck in a vacation scrape. I know what I'm doing, darling. Lay off me!”

Masking a warmer, a more tender sentiment with a frown that failed to mar the beauty of her face, “You knew what you were doing the last four times that your affairs went haywire,” Sylvia said. “You'd better let me in on this. These mammoth projects of yours usually need the wrecking crew sooner or later. What's the layout? Tell Mamma.”

“I'll tell Mamma when the time comes. Right now you take your

orders from Papa. Go out and get me thirty thousand dollars in currency and bring it back here quick. I'll meet you in this room. There's a gentleman in the next room who does not care to be seen."

"Who is he?"

"That's my business. You'll know all about this when the proper time comes. Go out and get the money for me. I'm ten years older than you are and twice your weight and if there is any more argument I'll knock you cold and throw the quivering remains in the Bay. Twenty-six is young to die. Get the money! Get it in fifties. Hurry up!"

RETURNING after a twenty-minute expedition to the Crocker Bank, Sylvia Deane handed Senator Colton a package of currency the size of a thin brick. "Here you are," she said. "The seals aren't broken. It's all there—and that's more than I can say for you."

The senator grunted. "That's the best-looking hat you ever wore," he said, smiling down at his secretary. "Wait here for a little while and I'll take you out to lunch."

"What about that mob of prominent citizens and sterling patriots in the parlor?"

"Jim can handle them. Wait here for me."

Reappearing seven minutes later, the senator handed Sylvia Deane a manila folder. "You take care of this," he said. "It's too hot for me to carry. If anything happens to me deliver these documents to the Secretary of State in Washington. When I say take care of these papers that's just exactly what I mean. I don't want you to turn them loose for a minute. Wear 'em! There may be a world war wrapped up in that package."

"Have I your permission to look them over?"

"Of course. Look them over but keep the dope under your hat. Permission to look them over! That's a silly request. I never keep anything from you."

"Who got the thirty thousand dollars for this stuff?"

Young Senator Colton smiled. He stuck out his tongue at his secretary. "That's my business," he said. "You know everything—but what you don't know won't get you bumped off."

"You sound like a movie gangster."

"I am," the senator declared. "Wait till the shooting begins and you'll be proud of your gangster."

At luncheon the senator evolved a scheme whereby he might avoid the thronging politicians who infested his suite at the Palace. "I'm going down the peninsula to Burlingame this afternoon and have

dinner with Desmond Cross tonight," he announced.

"Don't drink too much," Sylvia said.

"I'm not going down to drink with him. What do you think of honoring his newspapers with ammunition enough to start the next campaign for the party?"

An eager look in the senator's eyes gave Sylvia Deane the cue for her next question: "These mysterious documents that I'm wearing at the moment—is that your ammunition?"

"Part of it."

"I'd go slow right now if I were you," Sylvia advised. "You decided yesterday that it was a little early to open the battle."

"I hadn't seen those documents yesterday. Read them this afternoon. You'll see what I mean. I'll bring Desmond back with me tonight. I'd like to have you wait up for us, if you will."

"I'll be on the job," Sylvia said. "If you'll drink your coffee your driver can set me down at the hotel before you start for Burlingame. I'm anxious to see these high-priced documents. Something tells me you've invested thirty thousand dollars in a luxury."

"Wrong again," the senator smiled. "Wait till you read 'em. They're dynamite! When Desmond Cross explodes them in his newspapers there will be enemy scalps hanging in the treetops from here to New York." The senator drained his second cup of coffee. He set the cup down with a bang. "Darling, maybe you know everything but you've still got a lot to learn. Them thar papers is bad medicine for some mighty big Injuns. Just plain poison."

Sylvia smiled wearily. "A lot of people have lived through an overdose of poison," she suggested. "Don't forget that."

"I never forget anything, my sweet little wet blanket. Come on—I'll take you back to the hotel and roll on down to Burlingame. You'd better telephone Desmond that I'm coming. He might have a golf date."

In the seclusion of her room in the senator's suite at the Palace, Sylvia Deane telephoned Desmond Cross at Burlingame and then, eagerly, she began to investigate the contents of the manila folder. There were seven documents in the folder. One of them was a typewritten manuscript of ten pages. The other six were variously written with pen and ink, typewritten, or typewritten with revisions in three different scripts. Two documents were in French, two more of them in German with revisions in what Sylvia judged to be Russian. The ten-page typewritten manuscript and the two remaining documents were written in English. She began reading the ten-page

manuscript. When she had come to the bottom of the second page she glanced rapidly through the remaining portion with increasing haste. To the last page of the document whereon appeared three signatures she devoted a brief thirty seconds.

She reached for the telephone on her desk and called long distance.

“Burn a line through for me to Washington,” she directed, and then, becoming explicit, “this is an official rush call for Bradford Garnett at the State Department. Senator Colton calling.”

Enjoying precedence over other traffic, the call went through to Bradford Garnett in fifty-eight seconds. Instantly when she heard Garnett's voice, “Who is your hot spot ace out here?” Sylvia asked. “Is Seventeen still working in San Francisco?”

“Seventeen is on the other side of the Pacific,” Bradford Garnett informed her. “What sort of a job is it? We have three men in San Francisco right this minute.”

“The senator has bought some dynamite. Documents. Who is the high man in that game?”

“Chinese, six feet tall, weight one hundred and sixty-five pounds, Yale—name James Lee. His telephone number is China 7707. Ask for Lee Wong and say that Gettysburg is calling. Incidentally, how are you?”

“Thank you, Brad. I'm fine.”

“Married or single?”

“Still single. Goodbye.”

“Congratulations. Goodbye.”

Thirty seconds after she hung up on the Washington call Sylvia rang through to China 7707.

Waiting, she fumbled mentally with the word Shenandoah but instantly when the call was answered, “I wish to speak with Lee Wong,” she said. “Tell him Gettysburg is calling.”

Then in even tones a vibrant voice over the wire said, “James Lee speaking,” and suddenly Sylvia seemed to realize that the burden of her problem had shifted to stronger shoulders.

“This is Sylvia Deane speaking for Senator Colton. The senator has picked up some dangerous documents. When can I see you? Where can I see you?”

“Turn to your left from Grant Avenue at Jackson Street. A man will be waiting for you at the entrance of Ross Alley. He will guide you to my apartment.”

At the door of James Lee's apartment, which was on the second

floor of a building that stood on the west side of Ross Alley, Sylvia's guide knocked softly.

When the door opened, Sylvia faced a Chinese man who smiled at her. “I am James Lee, Miss Deane,” he said. “Mr. Garnett called me from Washington since you telephoned me. I am at your service. What is your problem?”

The girl handed the manila folder to James Lee. “Senator Colton paid thirty thousand dollars for these documents. He is spending the afternoon with Desmond Cross. Do you know Desmond Cross?”

“I know him,” James Lee said.

“Mr. Cross is coming back to San Francisco tonight with the senator to see these documents. Look at them. The senator intends to turn them over to Mr. Cross. Read them. You will understand what it might mean if the senator permits Mr. Cross to publish them in his newspapers. Read that ten-page affair first.”

Halfway through the ten-page manuscript James Lee quit reading. He turned to the last page of this document and inspected the three appended signatures. “This is very interesting, Miss Deane,” he said. “If it is authentic it means that Germany and Russia are better friends than Washington thinks.”

Sylvia Deane frowned. “And what else does it mean?”

James Lee looked straight at the girl for a moment and then, “Probably another world war,” he said quietly. After a moment, “If I remember correctly, the senator is inclined to specialize in luxuries of this kind.”

“Do you refer to the Bernal papers?”

“I had forgotten that case. I was thinking of the French indemnity memorandum that upset the Geneva tea party.”

Sylvia Deane nodded.

“They cost him a hundred thousand,” she said. “I was too late to save him—that time.”

“But this time—you flatter me.”

“You will do what you can? It isn't the money—it's the...” Smiling then at James Lee, “It isn't the first cost of these things. It's the upkeep of the senator's self-respect among other things. I think he's been hooked. Won't you please see what you can do?”

“Where did he get them?”

“They were turned over to him this morning in one of his rooms at the Palace. I don't know who brought them to him. He paid thirty thousand dollars for them.”

The tall Chinese closed his eyes for a moment.

“That has a reminiscent flavor,” he said. “Let's go into my library and we'll have a better look at these little gems of literature.”

Following James Lee into the room that he called his library, Sylvia observed that it was lighted by three windows in the west wall. Under these windows there was a long table littered with a miscellany of apparatus. The tall Chinese waved his hand toward the long table. “Cameras, microscopes, bottles, test tubes, junk in general—that's my stuff. All very portable when it's packed. First, let's have a look at this ten-page affair. I'll take a couple of photographs of the signature page and then I'll run a test on the paper. Nice clear typewriting, isn't it?”

“It's perfect work,” Sylvia agreed. “Almost too perfect.”

“That fact alone is significant,” the Chinese declared. “Five or six of the big-shot forgery crew have tendencies toward perfection.... How much time have I on this job?”

“If the senator has dinner with Desmond Cross in Burlingame he won't be back until ten o'clock. They might decide to come back to the hotel for dinner. Five o'clock is the deadline.”

“That gives me three hours. I can't read Russian script, can you?”

“Not a word of it.”

When the signature sheet of the ten-page manuscript had been photographed, “That final paragraph alone is war material enough to start another scrap,” James Lee said. “Specific aren't they! Listen: 'The Munitions Corporation of America guarantees to the governments of Russia and of Germany that high authority in government of the United States of America possesses full knowledge of the terms of this agreement and that the United States of America will in no way interfere with the deliveries of naval guns, salt, cotton or quicksilver to the ports designated.'”

James Lee scowled. “That's a big order,” he declared. “I wonder who the high authority in government may be.”

“That's probably the phrase that the senator paid for. You remember the documents that the senator procured covering the bribery of the Bolshevists by Germany.”

James Lee nodded. “Quite well. Document Sixty-eight was the important one.”

“You have a good memory,” Sylvia complimented.

“I played a small part in that show,” James Lee said.

“What do you make of this layout?” The Chinese waved his hand in the general direction of the six documents that lay to his left on the work table beside the manila folder. “Tell me in ten words. I have use

for your opinion."

"It means that the United States rides with Germany and Russia against France and Japan."

James Lee nodded. "You ran over ten words but I agree with you. And what about England?"

"England may be fortunate enough to keep out of it—for a while. Then she would smash Japan—and France...."

"How about shoving all of these papers into the fire and telling Senator Colton that you lost them?" James Lee suggested.

Sylvia's eyes widened. "That's absurd," she said. "That wouldn't change anything. If these documents are forgeries they mean nothing. If they're authentic, destroying them would mean less than nothing."

James Lee smiled. "I will telephone to you at five o'clock," he said. "You had better return to the hotel now. If the senator is dining in Burlingame it will afford me more time to work on them. One way or another we shall have to prevent their publication." Then, observing a quick look of doubt in Sylvia's eyes, "Have no fear," he said. "I will return the documents to you. I think I can persuade the senator not to publish them."

"I cannot leave without them. I pledged my word to the senator."

"Right! I'll see what I can do with photographic copies and samples of the paper. You don't mind if I clip a sliver of paper from each one of them, do you?"

"Of course not. I'm sorry that I cannot let you keep the originals."

WHEN James Lee had finished with his photography and after he had clipped sample slivers from the corners of each page of the documents Sylvia gathered up the seven documents and put them back into the manila folder.

At five o'clock, answering James Lee's inquiry, "The senator is on his way up here now with Desmond Cross," she said. "What luck?"

"So far not much luck," James Lee answered. "I'll call you later."

After he hung up the telephone he returned to the work table against the west wall of the room. He picked up the sliver of paper that he had clipped from the signature sheet of the ten-page document and dropped it into a small beaker. He poured an ounce of a dilute solution and boiled it for ten minutes. He poured off this liquid and washed the sliver of paper a dozen times in distilled water. He transferred the sliver of paper then to a small porcelain mortar and broke it up into a mass of fibers. He dried these between two sheets of filter paper. Then with a microscope needle he lifted a minute mass of

these fibers to a glass slide. He stained the fibers with a zinc-chlor-iodine solution and put the slide on the stage of a microscope. He swung a one-eighth-inch objective into place and after a quick adjustment of the sub-stage mirror he focussed the instrument.

"Three blue fibers! Esparto grass in linen! That's funny. I wonder why that great patriotic organization known as the Munitions Corporation of America, operating in the grand old state of Pennsylvania, uses an English paper for its documents! Item one."

He wrote a brief note in a memorandum book. "Now," he said, speaking half aloud, "we'll have a look-see at the type faces that wrote this perfect manuscript."

Eight minutes after he began the study of this element of his work he placed a New York call and got his number after a four-minute delay.

"James Lee speaking," he said. "Locate some of the Garwood typewriter officials and find out when they shipped their first electric carriage machines to Germany. Find out the date those new models went on the market in the United States. Find out when the first delivery of these machines was made to the Munitions Corporation. That's all. Burn it through to San Francisco—China 7707—wait a minute! Tell me what big shots in the forgery game are enjoying the climate of North America right now.... Wendell, 'London Red' Riley, Ceriga, Kameneff.... Wasn't Ceriga the man who specified currency in fifties in the Field blackmail case?... What—in San Francisco!..."

James Lee hung up the telephone and walked rapidly to the door of the room. In the hallway he turned to the left. At the far end of the hallway he opened the door of a room. In the room at the moment there were four men busily engaged in the great American game of trying to make two pair beat three of a kind.

"Hold the deal," James Lee ordered, smiling. "All bets are off for an hour or so. I want you to find Alexander Patros for me. Bring him in, if you find him. Five feet two, black hair, Greek, scar on the left of his chin, cigars, always tan shoes.... What else? Edwards, you know him better than I do."

"That's complete, Mr. Lee, except the trotting-horse watch chain—and Patros is an alias. Ceriga is his right name," Edwards answered.

"Check. You cover Third and Townsend. Mr. Walker, have a look at the airports. Mr. MacDonald, you and Mr. Stanley will get a line en the steamships. Where is young Mr. Francis?"

"He's probably at that joint on Grant Avenue."

"Drop in and tell him to go over to the Hall of Justice. Tell him to ask the police department on my authority to get a teletype order up

and down the coast for Ceriga's arrest. No radio. The radio is out! You lose more fish than you catch with radio. Bring Ceriga, alias Patros, in here to me. That's all."

James Lee left the room and returned to his work table in the library of his borrowed apartment.

WHEN Desmond Cross had finished reading the ten-page typewritten document, "This is the biggest piece of news that's busted since the Lusitania was torpedoed!" he exclaimed, facing Senator Colton and Sylvia Deane in the parlor of the senator's suite. "We've got to break it to the world tonight!"

The senator nodded. "Okay," he said. "Shoot the works."

To Sylvia Deane, "Please call Brook 6000, and tell Mr. Forest to come over here at once," Desmond Cross directed. "He's the managing editor of my San Francisco paper. Tell him to send some photographers over here."

To the senator, "Forest will handle everything," he said. "The story will be on the streets of the world in the next hour."

Sylvia reached for the telephone and when Central had answered, "I want China 7707," she said, lowering her voice in an attempt to keep Desmond Cross from hearing the number that she called.

On the instant, alert, "That's the wrong number!" Cross exclaimed. "Call Brook 6000. Let me have the phone!"

Frowning at Sylvia, "What's the matter with you?" Senator Colton asked in a quick flash of anger. "You've been trying to gum up this deal for the last fifteen minutes. Explain yourself."

The girl's eyes seemed to darken for an instant. Then meeting the senator's glare with a flaming glance, "You'd better hold this deal, as you call it. Do you realize the risk you run? Both of you?" Directly to the senator, "If there's anything wrong with these documents you will be the world's champion fool. You'll be the big joke of two continents —until somebody's hired man blasts you full of lead!"

"Call Desmond's editor or give him the telephone!" the senator commanded.

"I'll sock him with the telephone! Take five minutes out of this battle, both of you, and use a little common sense. Use some of mine if you haven't any of your own! In the first place, no newspaper has a right to these documents. In the second place, if they're forgeries Mr. Cross will sell his papers easily enough, but there will be a broken-down ex-United States senator among the newsboys. What's your big target—another world war or a new administration? Both of you make me sick!" The girl jerked the telephone out toward Desmond Cross.

“Here's your telephone. If you're fool enough to call your editor, call him!”

Cross took the telephone from Sylvia's hands. Hesitating, he turned to Senator Colton. “Are you sure these things are authentic?”

“Of course they're authentic!” the senator barked, but his voice seemed to lack its former element of dominant confidence. “Get your man up here.”

Desmond Cross, enjoying a brief self-comforting moment of defiance, nodded at Sylvia Deane. When the operator answered him, “Brook 6000,” he said harshly in the approved masculine manner. To his managing editor, “Rig the shop for a big story,” he directed. “Please come up to Senator Colton's suite in the Palace at once. Bring some photographers with you. We want to plaster the front page with pictures of some documents.”

Hanging up the telephone, he turned to Sylvia Deane. “Everything is all right, my dear,” Desmond Cross began, pitching his voice to the tone he might use in soothing a child who had been robbed of a stick of candy.

A knock on the door of the senator's parlor interrupted him.

Sylvia opened the door to confront James Lee.

“We'll receive no one for the next hour,” the senator ordered.

Ignoring this, “Come in, Mr. Lee,” Sylvia invited; and when the visitor entered, “Senator Colton, let me introduce Mr. James Lee. Mr. Cross, Mr. Lee. Mr. Lee is on the coast for the State Department.”

Bowing to Desmond Cross and to the senator, proceeding directly with his business, “Senator, the documents that Miss Deane submitted for my inspection are forgeries,” the Chinese man announced.

In a new outburst of anger, “What the hell is all of this?” the senator exploded. To Sylvia Deane, “What have you done—sold me out? How did this Chinese happen to get a look at this stuff?”

In an even voice, “I showed them to him,” Sylvia said.

Intervening before the senator could speak, “They are forgeries, Senator.”

“What do you know about it?”

James Lee raised his eyebrows. “I beg your pardon,” he said. After a moment's silence, “The documents are forgeries,” he resumed.

“You're crazy,” the senator contradicted. “How do you know they're forgeries? What right have you to...”

Interrupting the senator, James Lee raised his hand, and when the senator, impelled to silence, had cooled to a degree where he could

comprehend plain language, “For one thing,” James Lee began, “the ten-page manuscript was written on a typewriter that was not manufactured until eight months after the date of the document. I refer to the Munitions Corporation contract. The Garwood typewriter people began work on the type face used in the text of that document more than five months after the date of the document.”

The senator frowned. “And what else?” he asked in a voice that had lost the resonance of rage.

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“Several things,” James Lee suggested. “The paper on which the document was written was manufactured in England. The Munitions Corporation stationery happens to be manufactured in a paper mill in Massachusetts.” Then, abandoning his easy manner, “One moment, Senator—perhaps I have some additional evidence that may convince you.”

The Chinese walked rapidly to the door of the room. He opened the door. Speaking quietly to a man in the hallway, “Mr. Walker,” the Chinese said, “ask Mr. Edwards and Mr. Stanley to bring Ceriga up here,” he directed.

Returning to face the senator, “A couple of my assistants picked up the man who sold you these documents. They found him at the Third and Townsend station. He was leaving for Los Angeles.”

When Malio Ceriga, alias Alexander Patros, was brought into the room, handcuffed, to face the senator, “Tell your story, Ceriga,” James Lee ordered. “Make it brief.”

“The documents I sold you are forgeries,” the Greek faltered. “I

made them myself. I will give you back the money if you will use your influence to..."

"Enough of that!" James Lee interrupted sharply. Then to Senator Colton, "He has signed a full confession."

Nodding to his three men, "You can take him out," James Lee said. He reached into an inner pocket of his coat and hauled out a thick package of banknotes. "Here is your thirty thousand dollars." He handed the currency to Senator Colton. "You can reach Ceriga whenever you want for the next ten or fifteen years. He'll be in Alcatraz. He'll have to serve that long on another charge we have against him.".

James Lee turned from the senator and held out his hand to Sylvia Deane. "I'll bid you good night, Miss Deane," he said. "It's been a pleasure to have been of service—to you."

He nodded curtly in the general direction of Senator Colton. "Good night, sir," he said. "I hope you'll forgive Miss Deane for letting me in on this game."

"Just a second," the senator said. He got to his feet and held out his hand to James Lee. "Mr. Lee," he said, "west of the Rocky Mountains there is a strange animal known as a jasper louse. I apologize for being a jasper louse. I can't tell you how much I appreciate what you have done for me."

A moment after James Lee left, the senator pulled himself together with a visible effort. He walked toward a decanter of whisky that sat on a table against the west wall. He poured himself half a tumbler of bourbon, and then nodding at Desmond Cross, "You'd better join me," he said weakly.

When his companion had poured his drink, the senator lifted his glass toward Sylvia Deane. "I won't presume to drink this one to you, Sylvia," he said. "I'm using it for medicinal purposes only."

The girl smiled in the manner of a mother forgiving a wayward child. "Drink hearty," she said cheerfully.

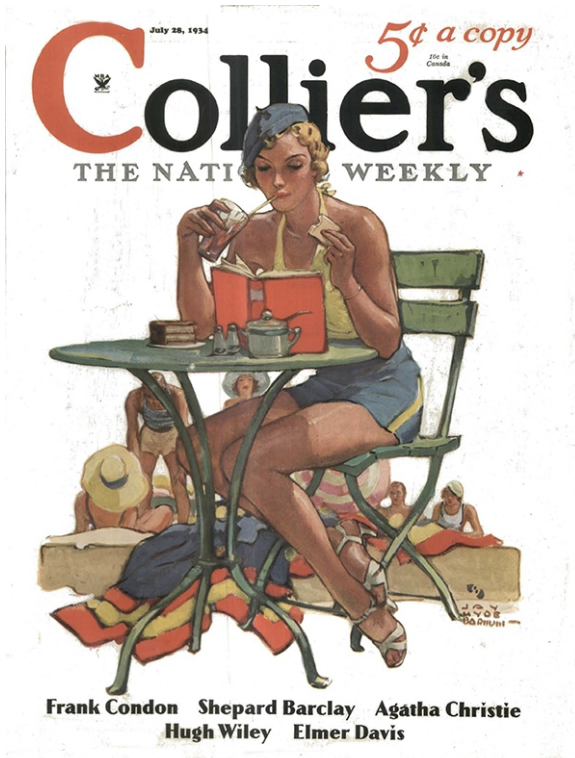
The senator drank heartily, and then, with a bravado born of humility, facing Sylvia, "You see what you've gone and done!" he said. "You spoiled a big story for poor old Desmond!" Following up this new indictment, when he had set his glass down the senator reached into his pocket and hauled out the thick bundle of currency. With a threatening gesture he waved the bank notes toward the girl. "Thirty thousand dollars! You know what I'm going to do with this? I'm going to take it down to Shreve's and trade it for a diamond ring as big as your ear! Then I'm going to make you a present of the ring."

Sylvia shook her head. "Not in a million years," she said.

“I never accept presents from the members of the Committee on Foreign Relations.”

The senator batted his eyes a couple of times. “Have it your way,” he said. “If you don't want the ring as a present you'll have to take it as an engagement ring. Make up your mind and be quick about it! I'm tired of all this monkey business.”

Hesitating a moment, Sylvia smiled at the senator. “If you're sure it will be a genuine diamond...” she began.



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C ollier's , August 4 1934

Mr. Wong:

TEN BELLS

A James Lee detective story—

by Hugh Wiley

A Hollywood murder mystery, wherein a lover does too much

talking and the soft tongued James Lee, under-cover man, does just enough.

"YOU MAKE me sick! What do you think I am, a sucker? Just slip me that ring and I'll be on my way. We're through!"

"But, Tommy darling, I've told you that ..."

"Don't Tommy darling me! Three nights at the Coconut Grove with the louse. Five or six times at Zenger's beach house—and God knows where else. Three, four, five o'clock in the morning and nobody answers but your mother when I call you up. Party girl! Give me back that ring! I'm through! Our engagement's busted. Give me back that ring before Mercer nicks it. The perfumed frog! If I wasn't all through with you I'd blast his heart out!"

Tommy Hale grabbed the girl's left wrist and tore a half-carat diamond ring off her finger. "There! From now on enjoy yourself with Mercer and anybody that is fool enough to string along with you!"

There were tears in Sally Chapman's eyes as she began bravely enough a recital of the truth. “I went out with Pierre Mercer because he said there was a good part for me in a picture. Zenger is directing it. He told Mercer to coach me for the voice tests. We could get married on the...”

“Voice tests with a full orchestra! Voice tests in Coconut Grove—and where else? Big shot in the bedroom scenes! You make me sick! I'd give Mercer a voice test with a .38 bullet through his throat if you were worth it! You rotten little liar! Us get married on your salary contract!” Tommy Hale's mouth curled in scorn. “All-night party girl!... So long!”

Tommy Hale stumbled down the steps that led to the street level from Sally Chapman's second-story apartment. He proceeded to add six slugs of bourbon to the preliminary six that he had carried into the battle with him.

AT NINE o'clock next morning he carried the biggest hangover that had ever been seep in the Galaxy Productions studio. Scene Thirteen of Death for Love was all set for action. Tommy Hale, functioning as property man, was all set for trouble.

A night of nerves and tears had been Sally Chapman's dividend of anguish. “Tommy will come back to you,” her mother had comforted.

“He thinks I lied to him about Mercer,” the girl sobbed. “Now it's all finished.”

All finished except the sequel which began in Scene Thirteen of Death for Love.

In Death for Love a lady's honor was involved, as usual. Vernon Zenger, directing the picture for Galaxy Productions, had hit upon the novel expedient of pistols for two as a means whereby the sullied name of the heroine might be restored to its pristine purity.

Walter Lodge, a visiting American running wild in Paris, had been challenged by Pierre Mercer. The duel scene had been rehearsed half a dozen times. With each rehearsal it became more evident that Death for Love was a comedy instead of a gripping drama of human hearts. With each discharge, of the duelists' pistols, Vernon Zenger, the director, seemed to realize that his reputation was being riddled with bullets.

At eleven o'clock, after indulging in a loud and bitter criticism of the manner, in which Walter Lodge, the visiting American, played his part, the director brushed this half of the dueling duet into a ringside seat. “I'll show you how I want it done,” Zenger barked. “Give me that gun!” He grabbed the long-barreled single-shot .38 pistol from Lodge's

hand.

Zenger walked over toward Tommy Hale, the property man. “Load this gun,” he ordered. He beckoned to Pierre Mercer. “Bring that other pistol over here and let Tommy load it with another blank.”

When the two pistols were loaded, reciting part of Rule Eighteen of the Code Duello as adopted at Clonmel in 1777, “Firing may be regulated first by signal, second by word of command,” Zenger admonished, addressing Pierre Mercer and his side-tracked opponent. “The word of command is 'Fire!' It is not necessary to pull the trigger of your pistol at that instant. Take deliberate aim before you shoot.... Ready? Let's go. Back to back, Mercer. March away five paces and, as you face about, the seconds together will give the command to fire. Come out here—keep your right arm pointing straight down.... Back to back... five paces now. Let's go!”

Marching apart, Zenger with a stride reminiscent of the Prussian goose-step, Mercer in the easy route step of the French army, the duelists halted at the fifth pace and wheeled to face each other. “Watch this, Walter!” the director cautioned. “Take it easy, Mercer. Don't hurry, you've got to get your aim.”

FOLLOWING the seconds' command to fire, Pierre Mercer lifted his pistol above his head and lowered it slowly, until it pointed finally at Vernon Zenger's heart. Approximating this action, but going through it more slowly than his opponent, Vernon Zenger's weapon lined up on Mercer's heart three seconds after the Frenchman had fired. “Deliberately, like this,” Zenger admonished for Walter Lodge's benefit. “There is no hurry. Your aim must be true.” With this, sighting his pistol straight at Pierre Mercer's heart, the director pulled the trigger.

Mercer's pose spoke of contempt for his adversary. His lips were curled in an expression of this contempt. In the script, following his opponent's fire, a bloodstain was to show on Mercer's left shoulder. In this rehearsal, following the bang of the director's pistol, the bloodstain showed over Mercer's heart. The expression, of contempt on his face changed instantly to surprise, and then he fell, crumpled in a heap.

“That's realism,” somebody on the side lines exclaimed, admiringly.

A moment later, lifting Pierre Mercer's head, listening in vain for the sound of his beating heart, Walter Lodge, who had been first to gain the side of the fallen man, looked up at the ring of startled faces.

“He's dead!” Lodge announced, horrified. “That gun was loaded! Tommy must have slipped a loaded cartridge into it by mistake!”

Still holding the pistol that had brought death to Mercer, Vernon Zenger looked down at the dead man. His gaze traveled from the dead man's face to the pistol in his hand. He dropped the pistol then and lifted his trembling hand toward Tommy Hale.

“You put a loaded cartridge into that gun!” he accused.

The property man's eyes widened with astonishment. Before surprise had changed to terror, “What do you mean, loaded cartridge? There's nothing but blanks in this box,” he protested. “How do you figure I could...”

Interrupting Tommy Hale, Walter Lodge, coolest of the group, waved a stop-signal at the property man. “Shut up!” he ordered. “This is going to be tough for you. You'd better not talk any more than you have to.”

Wildly then, rising from beside the dead man, Vernon Zenger continued the attack on Tommy Hale. Following a barrage of profanity, “You've killed him!” Zenger yelled. “You've slaughtered him! You damned, crazy, careless murderer!... Somebody get a doctor. Somebody call the police. Don't stand there! Somebody lend me a hand. Carry him over to that couch. Straighten him out. For the love of God, somebody bring me a drink of whisky. I've got to get a drink. Don't let anybody leave till the police get here. I've got to get a drink!”

Zenger walked off the set. Outside of the studio he turned to his left toward the building that housed the general offices of Galaxy Productions.

The girl's eyes blazed. “What are you trying to do? Didn't you tell me you were trying to save Tommy's life?”

IN THE San Francisco headquarters of the Hazard Guaranty Corporation James Lee Wong faced Ross Mason. The Chinese man, listed more simply on the federal pay rolls as James Lee, smiled at the vice president of the insurance company in thin but friendly sympathy. "I'm afraid you're stuck for the drinks," he said to the white man. "Outside of the owner's liability clause, the government's case is clear. The master of the ship is innocent enough. The opium and the Chinese men were smuggled in by the second officer and two of the engine-room gang. My report puts Captain Parrish in the clear."

"Your report won't clear him with the owners," Ross Mason growled. "He should have watched his crew more carefully. This will cost him his command.... How much will it cost us?"

"Thirty of my Chinese countrymen at a thousand dollars a head," James Lee answered. "The Treasury Department will probably slap a ten-thousand-dollar libel on the ship on account of the opium. It will probably cost you close to forty thousand dollars altogether, less your insurance premium."

Ross Mason groaned. "I'd like to pull the company out of marine risks altogether. Too much of a gamble. Look what the longshoremen in the Pacific ports have done to us."

"I'm looking at that next week," James Lee announced. "I'll have to ask you to hold what I tell you about this strike situation in strict confidence. There are some interesting angles to it."

Mason nodded. "I'll keep my mouth shut. There's some mighty expensive angles to it for us. What are you doing?"

"The Department seems to think that it would be a good idea to round up some of the big-league Communists who are out here on the Coast," James Lee confided. "I have orders to give the layout a look-see. Los Angeles is the quietest city on the Coast, consequently I have decided to begin my investigation down there."

At this, brightening for a moment, Ross Mason smiled at James Lee. "I suppose Washington hasn't rigged you up with a shorter work week by any chance?"

The government man shook his head. "I work four or five regular weeks every seven days—when I work.

"Still the human dynamo," Mason complimented. "Away back in the early days when I first knew you at Yale, none of us ever understood how you seemed to live without sleep."

"Good days—simple days," James Lee mused. "That was a long

time ago, before life became so complicated."

"They were grand days," Ross Mason agreed. After a reminiscent moment of silence, "The Company just picked up another expensive luxury in Los Angeles last week," he announced. "It's costing us two hundred thousand dollars. We wrote a blanket policy on the cast of a picture for a movie outfit. One of the actors was murdered."

"You refer to Pierre Mercer, the man whom the director of Galaxy Productions shot by accident in rehearsing a duel scene? The affair where the jealous property man slipped the loaded cartridge into the pistol instead of a blank?"

Ross Mason nodded. "It's the Mercer case. Galaxy Productions demands payment for the full amount of the policy—two hundred thousand bucks."

"That's a lot of money," James Lee said. "Movie stars seem to be worth more than smuggled Chinese."

"Jimmy, I wonder if you'd have time to look the Galaxy layout over for me." Ross Mason reached for a cigarette and lighted it.

James Lee's eyes narrowed. "Two hundred thousand dollars," he said. "It seems to me you need a banker more than you need me. Who is back of Galaxy Productions?"

"It's a one-man outfit. Lamon Ward is the man. He's president of Galaxy Productions. It's sort of a shoe-string affair. They made two or three quick ones last fall. Ward is head of the outfit and Vernon Zenger is their one and only director. They release through one of the larger companies. They were about halfway through this Death for Love picture when Mercer was killed. I can't see where they stand to lose two hundred thousand."

"Is that the only angle that interests you?"

Mason looked quickly at James Lee. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing much," James Lee said. "What do you know about Zenger?"

"He's an imported luxury," Mason announced. "Lamon Ward signed him up in Germany last year."

James Lee nodded. "What do you know about Lamon Ward?"

"Quite a lot," the insurance man affirmed. "He owned a shoe store in Chicago ten years ago. It blew up. He started a string of dyeing and cleaning joints and made a lot of money until some of the Chicago boys dynamited three of his places. He made a long jump out of the front line trenches of that war and landed in Hollywood. Up to three years ago he had a string of beauty parlors. He made an assignment for the creditors when beauty began to sell at a loss. Since then he's

been fluttering around in the picture game one way and another. He's a two-spot in the Hollywood deck, but it looks like his bad luck with Mercer will cost the Hazard Guaranty Corporation two hundred thousand dollars."

"Sounds like he's an interesting character," James Lee commented. "I'll look him up for my own amusement while I'm in Los Angeles. I'll let you know what I think of him when I get back."

James Lee got up and held out his hand to Ross Mason. "See you next week," he said briefly. Amending this, "See you next week—unless some of the local talent in the Communist crew rig up a vacation for me."

"Sorry," James Lee said. "Three or four cigarettes and every scene would look like the Chicago fire, I suppose"

"Sorry," James Lee said. "Three or four cigarettes and every scene would look like the Chicago fire, I suppose."

IN LOS ANGELES following a ten-minute confidential conversation with the Collector of United States Internal Revenue, James Lee was equipped with a document that carried him safely through the outer turmoil of Galaxy Productions, straight to the private office of Lamon Ward.

Facing the producer, "I know you are a busy man, Mr. Ward, and

I'll try to make our interview as brief as possible," Lee said. "I want to ask you about two or three minor items in your last year's income-tax return. It is possible that you have a refund coming from the government." Smiling at Mr. Ward, "Strangely enough the government makes mistakes now and then."

The picture man shook hands with his visitor. "That sounds like good news," he said. "Will you have a cigar?"

James Lee elected to smoke a cigar. After he had lighted it he dived into a complex dissertation wherein several items in Lamon Ward's individual income-tax return for the previous year became hopelessly tangled with the corporation income-tax return of Galaxy Productions.

Concluding his oration, "We have a recent Treasury ruling that will interest you. It should save you several hundred dollars. That's our bad luck, of course, but we are primarily interested in keeping the records straight."

Lamon Ward smiled pleasantly through a haze of cigar smoke. "That's the first good news I've had since Tiger was a pup," he said to James Lee. "All going out and nothing coming in is the theme song we've been hearing."

James Lee nodded sympathetically. "I know—the picture game is mighty tough on the producer's bank roll. The public doesn't know a thing about what it costs to make a big picture."

"Tough and then some! In this game right when a man thinks he's heading for a rake-off, something happens and before he knows it he skids into the red up to his neck. Look what happened on this picture we're shooting at the present time. Everything lined up for the home stretch and one of the leading characters gets himself killed!"

James Lee's countenance was a mask of interested innocence.

"I suppose there's no such thing as insurance on your actors while you're making a film?"

"Of course there's insurance," Ward returned. "I'll collect two hundred thousand from the Hazard Guaranty outfit on Mercer's accident, but what of it? That still leaves the books a long ways from the black ink."

James Lee's eyes widened in amazement. "I'd no idea pictures cost that much," he said. "It must be a terribly interesting game of heavyweight poker, playing for stakes like that."

"It is a terribly interesting game. Have you ever watched an outfit shoot a picture?"

"I never had the luck to be invited."

"Would you like to see them shooting Death for Love?"

“Nothing I'd like better.”

Lamon Ward got to his feet. “Come along. I'll introduce you to Vernon Zenger. He's the director. He's a big shot in the picture game. I discovered him in Germany. I'll introduce you to him and you can see what makes the wheels go round in a picture studio.”

A moment after his introduction to the director, James Lee reached into the left pocket of his coat and hauled out a polished silver cigarette case. He handed it to Zenger. “Will you have a cigarette, Mr. Zenger?” he asked.

The director smiled and shook his head. He handed the case back to James Lee. “Thanks,” he said. “We don't smoke while the cameras are working.”

“Sorry,” James Lee said. “Thoughtless of me. Three or four cigarettes with smoke drifting all over the shop and every scene would look like the Chicago fire. I suppose you have to pay as much attention to keeping the air clean as you do to the floor. That's what that boy is doing over there with the oiled mop, isn't it?” James Lee pointed to a Chinese boy who was erasing a trail of footprints from a waxed floor.

“That's it. We've got to watch every detail. If we don't, the public watches them for us—at our expense.”

AT SEVEN o'clock that night, James Lee rang the bell of the apartment where Sally Chapman lived with her mother.

“I want to talk with you about your friend Tommy Hale,” he said to the girl.

“Are you another reporter?”

“I'm making a confidential investigation of this case for the defense,” Lee answered. “You don't believe that Tommy is guilty of murdering Pierre Mercer, do you?”

“He's no more guilty than you are.”

“Where did the loaded cartridge come from?”

“I'm tired of that question. That's what everybody asks. How do I know?”

“Tommy loaded the pistol, didn't he? Have you talked with him about that detail?”

“You read what he said to the prosecuting attorney. He'd been loading those pistols all during half a dozen rehearsals of the scene.”

“Never mind that question. The district attorney dug up a motive for the murder.”

“Tommy was jealous. You mean the times I went out with Mercer?”

James Lee nodded. “It appears that he had reason to be jealous. You dined and danced with Pierre Mercer half a dozen times publicly, didn't you?”

“Of course I did. I went out with him because he wanted to help me with a part in the next picture that Zenger is going to make. Zenger told Mercer to teach me how to use my voice.”

“Where did you meet Zenger?”

“I met him in the studio. I called there two or three times when Tommy was going to take me out to supper.”

“How did you happen to visit Zenger's house?”

“He told Mercer to bring me out to see him. He wanted to talk to me.”

“Mercer was shot on Thursday. When you saw Tommy Wednesday night he threatened to kill Mercer, didn't he?”

“Yes—he was drunk.”

“Did Tommy own a .38 revolver or a pistol of that caliber?”

The girl nodded. “He had a .38 revolver that he used to take with him when he went into the mountains.”

“So that he might easily have had a few loose .38 cartridges lying around his house?”

“I hadn't thought about that at all. He wouldn't be careless with things like that.”

“You mean if he did put a cartridge into the pistol that killed Mercer it would have been a deliberate act on his part—and not carelessness?”

The girl's eyes blazed. “What are you trying to do! Didn't you tell me you were trying to save Tommy's life?”

James Lee bowed. “I am trying to save Tommy's life,” he said.

THERE was some difficulty in locating Wong Bok Chung, but after five unsuccessful telephone calls James Lee managed to get a line through to that eminent member of the Wong family.

After appropriate inquiries regarding the health and well-being of his distinguished countryman, and after a cackling series of felicitations had been enjoyed under the Ritual of Right Conduct, still speaking in the common Cantonese dialect, “I desire to obtain the address of one of our countrymen who dwells within your district,” James Lee explained. “His name is Chin Hoy.” Lapsing into English, “He is employed in the studio of Galaxy Productions. I wish to see him

tonight. I am at the Biltmore Hotel."

"He will visit your room before midnight," Wong Bok Chung promised.

"Long life and plenteous years," James Lee concluded.

At eight minutes after eleven o'clock Chin Hoy knocked on the door of James Lee's room in the Biltmore Hotel.

"How may I serve you?" the visitor asked after he had been admitted to the room.

"I am interested in the regrettable tragedy that involved the death of Pierre Mercer," James Lee answered. "You were present when Mercer was shot, were you not?"

With the memory of the scene masking his face with sorrow, "I saw the white man die," Chin Hoy said.

"Did you see Tommy Hale load the pistol that the director, Vernon Zenger, used?"

"I did not observe that."

"At each rehearsal of the duel, after the pistols were fired, what became of the empty cartridges?"

"Mr. Tommy Hale threw them on the floor. In the course of my work I swept them up."

"What did you do with them?"

The frown on Chin Hoy's olive-tinted brow softened. "I have a little daughter," he said. "She is six years old. I saved the empty cartridges and made a necklace of tinkling bells for her to wear."

James Lee reached in his pocket and produced a roll of currency. He snapped a twenty-dollar bill toward Chin Hoy. "Take this money. Get a taxi cab; go home; bring me that necklace of tinkling bells. Tomorrow you can give your daughter another bit of jewelry to replace the one I want. One moment!... Can you remember how many empty cartridges are in the necklace?"

For ten seconds Chin Hoy stared blankly into the obscure caverns of memory and then, "I bought nine bits of white jade to go between the bells," he said. "There are ten empty cartridges in the necklace. They are hung on a silken cord."

"Did you get them all?"

"I got all of them except the two that were fired at the time of the murder. The police officers kept them and the pistols."

In the hour after midnight Chin Hoy returned with the necklace he had made for Lily Chin out of the empty cartridges. "Here it is," he said, handing the tinkling ornament to James Lee. "And here is also

sixteen dollars and eighty cents—your change from the twenty-dollar bill."

"Thank you—keep that money. It will buy a silver necklace for your daughter." James Lee carried the string of empty cartridges to a cone of bright light that flooded the top of a writing desk. In this strong light he studied the empty cartridges for five minutes, examining the metallic shells under an eight-diameter Coddington lens. He reached in his pocket for a knife and cut the silk cord that joined the cartridges and the nine bits of white jade. He handed the jade and the fragments of the cord to Chin Hoy. "You may have these," he said. "Return to your home now. You will say nothing to anyone of what you have done tonight, of what you have seen, of what I have said to you."

Chin Hoy bowed to James Lee. "A wise man understands a nod," he returned. "I hope Kwan Yin may smile upon you."

James Lee nodded and held out his hand to his countryman. "Good luck," he said, shaking hands in the western manner. "Good luck and good night."

After his visitor had left, James Lee turned again to the ten empty cartridges that lay on the table in the bright glare of the reading lamp. He inspected them once more with his magnifying lens, dividing them into two groups. There were five cartridges in each group. He put them into two envelopes and dropped them into the left pocket of his coat. Then he went to bed.

The next morning at nine o'clock, after he had bathed and breakfasted, he went to the police headquarters. In the office of Lieutenant Crowell, who was in charge of the homicide squad, after he had introduced himself, "I would like to see the exhibits in the Mercer case," he explained.

"Anything you want is yours," Lieutenant Crowell answered. "I'm mighty glad to meet you, Mr. Lee. How does it happen you're interested in this Mercer killing?"

"I'm checking up for the Hazard Guaranty people. Mercer's death stuck them for two hundred thousand dollars." James Lee paused. "Do you think there's a chance of getting a confession out of Hale?"

Lieutenant Crowell grunted.

"He'll take his walk to the gas chamber without breaking. He rigged the murder...."

Interrupting Lieutenant Crowell, one of his clerks came in with the exhibits in the Mercer case. "Here's the gun that Tommy Hale shoved the loaded cartridge into," the lieutenant explained. "Here's the bullet that the surgeons took out of Mercer's heart. Here's another test bullet

we fired to match up the rifling of the pistol. Here's the empty cartridge that held the death bullet and..."

"Let me see that cartridge!"

A close observer might have detected an unusual nervous tension in James Lee's manner at this moment.

Lieutenant Crowell handed him the empty cartridge that had held the death bullet. "Union Metallic .38," he said, and when James Lee produced his magnifying lens, "You'll see that it is flared a little on the open end. The pistol was chambered for a longer cartridge."

James Lee gave thirty seconds to a careful inspection of the death cartridge, and then he put the cartridge and the magnifying lens on the desk in front of Lieutenant Crowell. "Tommy Hale is innocent," he said quietly. From the left pocket of his coat he hauled out the two envelopes containing the ten empty cartridges that had been part of Lily Chin's necklace. He opened these envelopes. "The Chinese sweeper in the studio saved these shells," he explained. "They were fired in rehearsing the duel scene. Take that lens and look at the impressions of the firing pins in the soft copper caps.... Look at these five empty cartridges from the first pistol.... Now look at this other group. They were fired from the second pistol. Observe the little V-shaped mark that the firing pin made. Remember the two short parallel lines made by the firing pin of the first pistol."

"I see the difference," Lieutenant Crowell said. He picked up the empty cartridge that had held the death bullet. Through the magnifying lens he looked at the impression of the firing pin in the soft copper cap in the end of the empty brass shell for ten seconds and then, voicing the conclusion that followed a brief train of reasoning, "There must have been a third pistol!" he exclaimed. "This differs from both of the other types! The firing pin that hit the copper cap in the death cartridge is different from the other two!" Looking straight at James Lee, "That means there must have been a third pistol," he repeated. "Zenger carried the third gun—and nobody saw him make the switch!"

"Right!" James Lee nodded in agreement with this statement. "If I may suggest the next move, Lieutenant, you will arrest Zenger right away."

"Right away and then some!" Lieutenant Crowell exploded. He reached for one of the telephones on his desk.

"Just one second." James Lee laid his hand on the lieutenant's arm. "It might be well to have your men arrest Lamon Ward along with Zenger—but keep them apart."

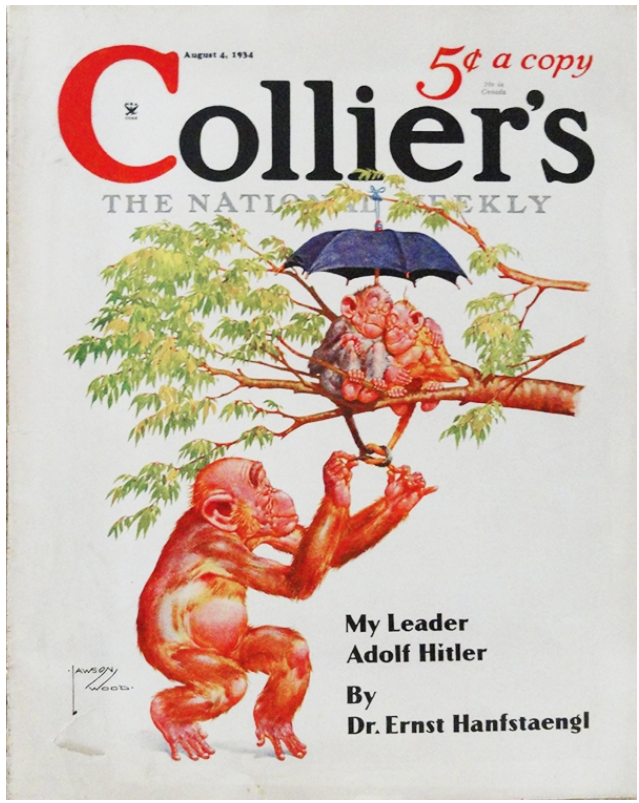
After a moment's thought Lieutenant Crowell smiled grimly.

“You're right,” he said. “Ward would be the one to get the insurance money. I'll bring him in along with Zenger.... You've done a mighty slick piece of work, Mr. Lee.”

“Lamon Ward and Zenger did the slick piece of work,” James Lee amended.

“Slick enough,” Lieutenant Crowell agreed. “They only missed the firing pin trick—but you happened to ring the bell with the ace of trumps.”

James Lee smiled at the lieutenant's compliment. To himself, “Ten bells!” he reflected. “The ten tinkling bells of Lily Chin's necklace—the death knell for Ward and Zenger.”



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C ollier's , December 15 1934

Mr. Wong:

LONG CHANCE

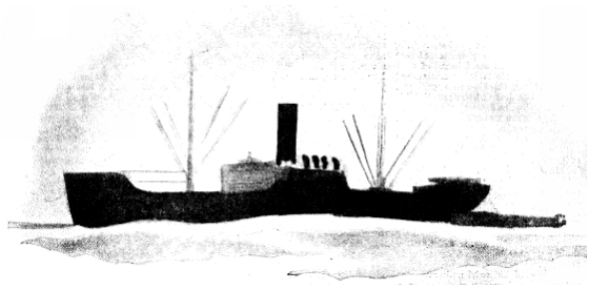
A James Lee detective story—

by Hugh Wiley

illustrated by Irving Nurick

Long Chance. Taken by James Lee Wong.

Edgar Parmill missing, with one hundred thousand dollars—another simple adventure of soft-spoken James Lee Wong



TROUBLE with a thrust bearing held the Palomita in the open sea seventy miles out of San Francisco Bay for three sunlit days and three clear nights. On the fourth evening of her distress, Monday night, a dripping fog obscured the crescent moon. The fog seemed to have a curative effect on the Palomita's thrust bearings. Before midnight, under a slow bell, she nosed through the Golden Gate.

Barely under steerage way a sudden activity replaced the quiet on the ship's forward deck. A power launch drifted out of the night and nestled against the Palomita's quarter. The launch, trailing on a line, slid aft along the tramp's rusty hull for eighty feet and then held her position for eighteen minutes. When the launch cast off and stood away from the steamer she carried a hundred Chinese who had come over the ship's side. Within the hour these men had become members of the Chinese colony in San Francisco.

The enterprise should have been accomplished with complete secrecy, but before the launch had landed its Chinese cargo the wireless operator on the Palomita had tied in with a short-wave set in a Japanese residence on Fillmore Street. Forty words in private code went through with only casual interference at that hour, to the alert ears of Amano Kimura. To the world at large Mr. Kimura was a recognized authority on various branches of oriental art.

Immediately upon receipt of the message from the wireless operator of the Palomita, Mr. Kimura's interest in oriental art gave place to a sudden activity in connection with a more material project. Forthwith he left his apartment in the Fillmore Street house and headed for Chinatown.

ON TUESDAY morning at nine o'clock in his San Francisco apartment James Lee Wong received Sam Wing. Facing his diminutive Chinese countryman, James Lee smiled. “The years have been kind to you,” he said. “You look younger than you did in your freshman year.”

“Yale was a grind,” Sam Wing answered. “Too much night work.”

“And now each night as chief of aviation for the Nanking Government you enjoy eight or ten hours of sound, refreshing sleep?” Irony tempered the speaker's smile. “I hope that you will not sleep too much.”

Sam Wing scowled. “I have slept too much,” he admitted. “I need your help. Can I tell you my story—off the record?”

After a moment, “On the pay roll of the United States Government I am an operative in the Department of Justice,” James Lee answered. “In this room for the moment I am your former classmate and your friend. Tell your story.”

“Do you know Edgar Parmill?”

“I met him in Shanghai six years ago. One of the greatest flyers in the world. Is he in town?”

“Parmill and I came in from China last week,” Sam Wing said.

“He works for you?”

“He works with me. Nominally I'm his chief. Actually he knows more aviation in ten minutes than I'll learn in a lifetime. We came over to buy four bombing planes from the Meteor people. Parmill has been under cover at the Palace Hotel since he got here. I have been here on Grant Avenue. One of the Meteor representatives is down from Seattle.”

“Where is he?”

“At the Palace. We were to have signed the contract for the four planes this morning. Parmill didn't show up.”

James Lee nodded. “And Parmill has the money. It's a cash transaction, I suppose. What is the price of the four planes?”

“Twenty-five thousand apiece. Parmill had a hundred thousand in cash at one o'clock this morning—but please do not suggest...”

“You never can tell....”

“You can tell with Parmill,” Sam Wing declared vehemently. “A million in gold would not buy that man. It's been tried.”

“Parmill does not happen to be a Chinese patriot by any chance, does he?”

SAM WING frowned. Facing his tall companion, “You never believed in anything,” he accused. “You were always that way. You never gave any man credit for decent motives. Parmill is one of China's greatest friends. He is my friend.”

“A hundred thousand dollars, is a lot of money.” James Lee yawned and reached for a cigarette. “Speaking of my beliefs—I believe in human nature,” he suggested.

Sam Wing paced the length of the room. Returning, he looked straight at James Lee. “I think I made a mistake coming to you,” he said.

James Lee nodded. “You've made several mistakes in your time. Your stupidity is notorious in Tokyo. Your mistake of last night is a perfect example of your stupidity.”

“What do you mean?”

“THAT gold-bearing cargo of Cantonese that came ashore from the Palomita.”

“You know about that?”

“There is a report of it on my desk over there.”

A look of fear clouded Sam Wing's eyes. “Jim,” he said, “you wouldn't...”

James Lee shook his head. “No, I wouldn't,” he said reassuringly. “Maybe you forget that you're in the house of a friend.”

“Then for the sake of friendship find Parmill for me. Our people care nothing about the money. Find Parmill for us. We need him.”

“Where did you see him last?”

“There was a midnight banquet—half a dozen of the Five Family men, three or four of the Friends of China crew, an American man, old Sing Lung, Parmill and I.”

“Where was this?”

“In the Five Family banquet hall in the house of Sing Lung.”

“Who was the American?”

“Egan Rylett. He gave ten thousand dollars to the Cause last year.”

James Lee nodded. “That was last year,” he suggested. “What happened?”

“Specifically, somewhere around one o'clock old Sing Lung and some more of the Five Family men opened the Tong safe and handed over a hundred thousand dollars.”

"Handed it to Parmill?"

Sam Wing nodded. "Yes. Parmill and I counted it. He put the money in his pocket. He left Sing Lung's place ten or fifteen minutes later in a taxicab. We were to have breakfast together this morning at eight o'clock. Our date with the Meteor man was for nine o'clock. I telephoned Parmill's room at eight o'clock and there was no answer. One of the hotel men opened the room for me at eight-thirty. Parmill had not slept in his bed. I don't think he returned to the hotel. If he did no one saw him."

James Lee was silent for a moment and then, "Sounds like a tough one," he said. "Let's go over and have a talk with Sing Lung."

Sam Wing's eyes lighted. "You will help me?"

James Lee nodded. "I'll do what I can," he promised.

SING LUNG, nominal head of the Five Family clan, greeted James Lee and Sam Wing in the reception-room of his house. Phrases spoken according to the ritual of Right Conduct used up the first two minutes of the meeting and then, replacing his steel-bowed spectacles, "How may I serve you?" Sing Lung asked.

"Edgar Parmill, the American, has disappeared," James Lee said.

Sing Lung's eyes widened. "With the money?"

"With the money—but that is of no consequence compared to his safety," Sam Wing interposed. "Mr. Lee would like to talk to the taxi driver who took Mr. Parmill to the Palace Hotel. Can you find him?"

Old Sing Lung nodded. "Easily enough. He sleeps every morning in a room rented from my cousin. He will be here in ten minutes."

Addressing the taxi driver, a free-lancing pirate of Grant Avenue's night life, ten minutes later, "You are an Italian?" James Lee asked.

"A Serbian."

"Where did you take the American gentleman who left the dinner party last night at one o'clock or one-fifteen'"

"He wanted to go to the Palace Hotel. He said the Montgomery Street entrance."

"Did you take him to the Palace?"

"He stopped me half a block before we got to Market Street. He said he wanted to get some cigarettes."

"Did you get them for him?"

"He got out and paid me off. He said he would get his cigarettes and walk across Market Street to the Palace."

“Did you see what shop he went to?”

“I never seen him after he paid me. I turned around and beat it back, to my stand.”

James Lee nodded at the man. “That's all,” he said.

When the Serbian had left, “Somebody got Parmill between the cigar store and the hotel,” Sam Wing suggested.

James Lee nodded. “Probably. That doesn't help us much.”

“What about talking to the cops on that beat?”

“Not yet,” Lee answered. “I think I'd like to see Mr. Rylett. Call him up and make a date for me, will you?”

“You going to tell him that Parmill has disappeared?”

“He probably knows it.”

“I don't think so.”

“How long has he known Parmill?”

“He never met him before last night. Rylett doesn't like many people. He's rich enough so that he doesn't have to. Parmill made a hit with him. They talked Chinese art and stone-age stuff for an hour together. Rylett is a nut on Chinese archeology. When he found out that Parmill had opened up a string of graves in Kansu he went deaf to everything else.”

“Rig up a date for me,” James Lee repeated. “I may introduce a dash of art into my conversation with Mr. Rylett.” Smiling grimly, “Stone-age stuff.”

“You sound like Rylett was a member of the enemy camp,” Sam Wing objected. “He is a friend of China.”

James Lee scowled. “China has various sorts of friends.”

“You're still capable of a little twisted thinking.”

James Lee's eyes narrowed. “No doubt,” he admitted. “Get on the phone and see what you can do with Rylett. Date me for dinner if you can.”

Addressing the taxi driver ten minutes later, James Lee asked, “Where did you take the American gentleman who left the dinner party at one o’clock or one-fifteen?”

GREETING Mr. Lee at eight o'clock that evening, “I am delighted to have you as my guest,” Egan Rylett said. “Most opportune! Mr. Wing tells me you are interested in Chinese art. Happy coincidence! Amano Kimura is dining with us tonight. You've heard of him—the great Japanese authority on Han pottery and the earlier Chinese bronzes.

“Everyone has heard of him,” James Lee complimented. “I thought he was still in Peru.” Clawing through the archives of his memory for another Kimura item, “The monograph on Peruvian pottery—Kimura did some work in that field years ago, if I remember.”

Egan Rylett beamed with pleasure and with a quick vicarious pride in this tribute to Amano Kimura. “Two men today—two men alone are masters on that subject! Kimura is one of them.”

Meeting Amano Kimura, James Lee shook hands with the Japanese. “I am honored,” he said. “How is your work in Peru?”

“Very happy to meet the distinguished Mr. James Lee,” Kimura declared. “I have had some success in Peru.” He lifted a cigarette to his lips and devoted the next four seconds to an obvious enjoyment of its aroma.

A THIN drift of smoke from Kimura's cigarette wavered toward James Lee. “Interesting cigarette,” the Chinese reflected. “Indian grown—with a dash of majoon. Gunjah.” To Kimura, quickly, and without being conscious of the impulse that prompted the question, “You have lived in Calcutta?”

Kimura looked up at James Lee. A faint expression of surprise marked his reply.

“For a year. Why?”

Regretting his ill-timed inquiry, James Lee resorted to a lie: “A friend of mine in Calcutta, Semple Wainwright, told me about your researches in Peru.”

“Mr. Kimura has lived in Peru for five years,” Egan Rylett interposed.

At this, glancing at Rylett and then looking up at James Lee through narrowed eyelids, “Your friend Wainwright is also a secret operative for the Department of Justice? Or should I say 'secret'?”

Before James Lee could reply, Egan Rylett stepped away from his two guests. He looked at James Lee in undisguised surprise. “You are an agent of the Department, Mr. Lee?”

The Chinese nodded at his host. “Everyone seems to know that.”

“But Sam Wing said that you were an authority on...”

“I must confess that I am only an amateur in Chinese art. It is, let us say, my pleasure—not my vocation.”

The moment became frozen. Lee damned himself for the maladroit inquiry that had been prompted by the scent of Amano Kimura's cigarette. Then leaping into the silence with a patent air of frankness, “The Department has several of us out here covering the San Francisco-Denver gold transfer,” he explained. “Carrying millions of dollars in gold hundreds of miles is a tempting opportunity for some of the country's bad actors.”

“Two billion dollars in gold, isn't it?” Egan Rylett did the best he could to thaw the frozen moment. “May I offer you cocktails before we dine?”

The cocktails were served in chilled cups of white jade.

“These are delicious,” James Lee complimented. “I have never tasted such an intriguing combination of flavors. Am I wrong in congratulating you on a successful combination of bourbon and Curacao?”

Egan Rylett smiled. “The chocolate flavor betrays it,” he suggested.

“Chocolate? Cinnamon, mace, cloves, perhaps—but no chocolate.”

“There must be chocolate in it,” Rylett insisted. “Let me get a book I have. Strange that neither one of us seems to know what is in curacao.... No matter. May I offer you a second one?”

James Lee bowed. “Thank you.”

“Will you look it up in the encyclopedia, Mr. Lee? I'll be back in a moment. I want to see if my butler knows anything about this stuff. You'll find the encyclopedia over by that window.”

On page 62 of volume 6 of the encyclopedia under “Curacao” James Lee read three lines of the text aloud to Amano Kimura: “A well-known and palatable liqueur, made from orange peel by digesting it in sweetened spirits, with certain spices...” and here his reading was interrupted by a quick sneeze.

“That cigarette of Kimura's is very pungent,” the Chinese reflected, realizing that a strong scent of hashish had made him sneeze.

“... as cinnamon, mace, or cloves,” he continued. He looked up quickly, “Forgive me,” he apologized. His eyes fell again to the text in the open book. An inch under “Curacao” he read “Curare, a celebrated poison used by some tribes of South America '... causing complete paralysis without affecting consciousness....”

Returning from his interview with his butler, “You're right, Mr. Lee,” Egan Rylett admitted. “There is no chocolate in curacao. Here I am sixty years old-a man with a fair knowledge of such things and up to this moment I have believed that curacao contained chocolate.”

“According to the encyclopedia it contains an essence of orange peel and cinnamon and other spices. Chocolate isn't mentioned. Perhaps you confuse curacao with cacao.”

“Perhaps that is it.... Dinner is announced. Shall we go in?”

As the dinner progressed, Lee became increasingly conscious of the problem that faced him. Under the small talk, of which there was a minimum, and the heavier conversation, his thoughts reverted incessantly to the fate of Edgar Parmill. *“Where is Parmill? If these men got Parmill, how did they get him?”*

IN THE interval preceding dessert Lee contemplated subjecting Egan Rylett to a brief interrogation relative to his association with Edgar Parmill and the purchase of the bombing planes. After a moment's thought he doubted the advisability of mentioning Parmill's name. He thought of the twin machine guns mentioned in the specifications. He remembered a phrase that Sam Wing had used —“synchronized to fire through the propeller arc.” He realized that he must time any inquiry relative to Parmill with a similar precision. “Or why not release a hundred-pound demolition bomb and be done with it?” Instinct told him that he was nearing the battle ground. *“Who is Kimura? What a fool I am! He's a shark on archeology—but what else is he?”*

Egan Rylett's butler spoke quietly to his master. Turning to James Lee, “There is a telephone call for you, Mr. Lee,” Rylett said. Then, “Sam Wing is calling you. May I have the telephone brought here to the table?”

“That was a bit crude,” the Chinese reflected. Aloud, “Thank you, yes.”

Over the telephone, “The police have found Parmill,” Sam Wing said. “Are you alone?”

“Two loads on the bomb rack mounted right and left,” Lee answered. “That clause was in the specifications.”

“I understand. Parmill is in the Emergency Hospital. He has been drugged with something that left him paralyzed. He is still alive and conscious. The Chronicle and the Examiner had extras on the street ten minutes ago. The police know who Parmill is. I believe they are turning the case over to the State Department.”

Instantly, taking a long chance, inspired by an unaccountable impulse, “You will find the address of the Portuguese agents in Potter's Directory,” James Lee said. “Caroval was the high man when I knew the outfit. Vao Caroval. V-a-o C-a-r-o-v-a-1.”

“I get you.”

“I will return to my apartment around midnight. If I can be of any further help let me know.... I have my own car. See you later.”

Returning the telephone to Rylett's butler, who stood beside his chair, “Sam Wing is a bargain hunter,” Lee announced. “He is on the trail of a dozen secondhand planes that are owned by a Portuguese outfit,” Lee explained. “Sorry to interrupt. Incidentally, do either of you happen to know Vao Caroval?”

“I do not know him,” Rylett said.

“A Portuguese gentleman, you say?” Something in Kimura's question sent an honest thrill of fear down James Lee's spine.

“I think he is a Portuguese—of some Latin stock at any rate.”

“Vao and Caroval are native names for a South American poison known as curare in the Materia Medica,” Kimura explained, smiling in a superior manner. “The Potter who publishes the directory you mentioned would not be related to the distinguished author of the book on poisons and various medical works?”

AT THIS question a burden of doubt seemed to lift from James Lee's heart. He realized instantly that his problem was simplified. He sought quickly to follow his advantage with the impelling force of a direct question. Facing Kimura, “Why did you kill Edgar Parmill?” he asked.

From his left, “Mr. Lee! What do you mean?” Egan Rylett demanded. “Do you insinuate...”

The rest of Rylett's question was drowned in a series of explosions

that boomed from the muzzle of a .30-caliber automatic in Amano Kimura's hand. The Japanese held the gun steady on the edge of the table. The gun was aimed at James Lee's heart. Kimura fired five shots before the grimace of hatred in his face changed to a sardonic smile of physical anguish when his fire was returned from a weapon in his opponent's hand.

James Lee put his heavy service .45 back into its holster slung under his left armpit. He turned to Egan Rylett. “If you will be kind enough to pour a glass of brandy for Kimura perhaps we can keep him alive for a while. I would like to force a confession out of him—to keep the records straight.”

Rylett, his eyes wide with terror, was backing slowly away from James Lee. “Keep him alive?” he questioned thickly. And then, “But you—aren't you shot?”

“Steel vest,” Lee said briefly. “Dented a little bit perhaps, but that's all.... Mr. Rylett, I must apologize for this messy affair—but Edgar Parmill is dying. Kimura got him. Poisoned him with curare.”

AN HOUR after midnight, in his apartment on Grant Avenue, facing Sam Wing, “Rylett had nothing to do with Parmill's murder,” James Lee declared. “Kimura's confession clears him.”

“Where is the hundred thousand?”

“Kimura had it in his pocket. Here it is—with my compliments.”

“China thanks you. This means four bombing planes for use against her enemies.”

“You'd better cut out the midnight immigration stuff or I'll have to look you over officially. Why not use more of Rylett's money?”

Sam Wing smiled. “If it will clear your conscience, we're shipping a hundred of our countrymen, fighters, back to China on the Tenyo Maru.... My God, Jimmy, you were playing against heavy odds.”

“Not so heavy. My own ignorance was the main obstacle. I should have known about Kimura's tie-up with Tokyo. As it happens, I'm lucky—Kimura dug his own grave. Curare. The fool made his big mistake in his question about Major Potter—you remember when I mentioned Vao Caroval over the telephone? Ego. Kimura had to show me then and there that he knew more about South American arrow poisons than I did. Vao and Caroval—curare has fifty names.... Poor Parmill.”

“Terrible,” Sam Wing commented. “Lying there completely conscious, wide awake, utterly helpless—paralyzed.”

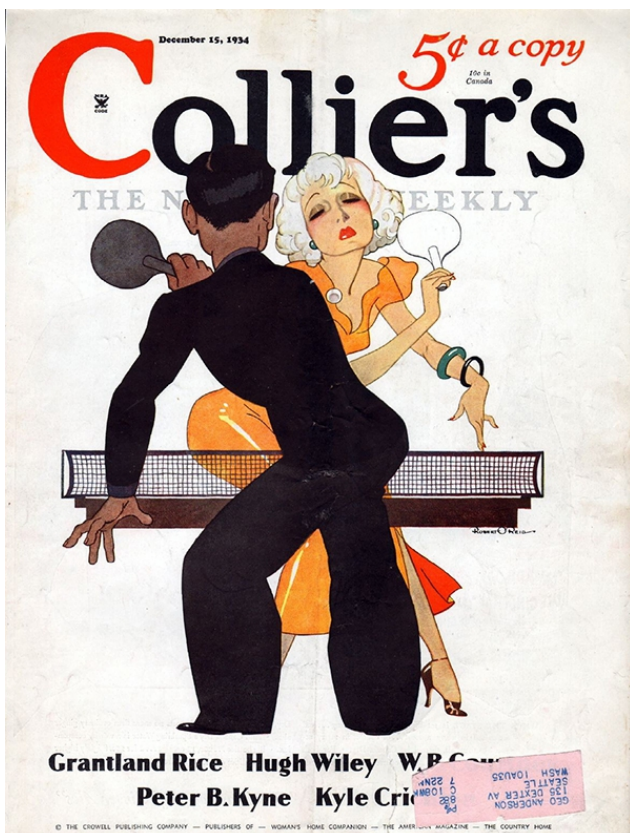
“Kimura confessed that he got him with a jab in the shoulder two minutes after Parmill got out of that taxicab.”

“I'm sorry you didn't torture that Jap for a while.”

“The blow-off wasn't easy for him. I promised him I'd see that his chief in the Javanese Foreign Office got a copy of his confession. That was torture enough for the egotistical little rat!”

“I'm glad of that,” Sam Wing declared. Then, after a moment, “You surely took a long chance. The odds were a million to one against you.”

James Lee smiled. “Kimura dug his own grave—after the trifling little curacao argument.... You remember that night in New Haven when I drew the jack of diamonds in a stud game and made a straight flush? Those things happen now and then. Just plain lucky.”



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C ollier's , May 25 1935

Mr. Wong:

A RAY OF LIGHT

A James Lee detective story—

by Hugh Wiley

illustrated by Irving Nurick

A Ray of Light. Beauty in distress; James Lee Wong to the rescue. Page 21

The mystery of Louise Harwood's missing diamond—and of the man who gave it to her. A perfect case for James Lee, soft-spoken Department of Justice under-cover man. And a curiously fascinating story.

"You have made it possible for life to be happy for me," the girl whispered.

AT SIX o'clock in the evening one of James Lee's assistants rang through from Los Angeles with a progress report on a narcotic case involving men and methods important enough to have interested the Department of Justice. At six-fifteen James Lee's chief rang through to

San Francisco with some new dope on a couple of big-shot public enemies who were supposed to be heading for San Francisco. Seven minutes after he had finished this conversation with his chief, Mr. Joseph Temple called him on the telephone.

“I should like to see you for half an hour,” Mr. Temple said. “Can you have dinner with me at my house? I have a new consignment of emeralds that might interest you.”

“The emeralds sound tempting. I'm working tonight. Are you downtown?”

“I'm in my office.”

“Why don't you drop in on your way home?”

“I'll be there in fifteen minutes. I am bringing Meade Capron with me. Not socially—he's part of the plot.”

“Bring him along.”

When he had hung up the telephone James Lee walked from the living room of his apartment to his kitchen. “Light up the library,” he said to his houseboy. “Two gentlemen will be here in a few minutes.”

“Cocktails?” the servant asked.

Before James Lee could reply his cook added another question to the house boy's interrogation. “Two men stay for dinner?”

James Lee shook his head at the cook. “No,” he said, and then to the younger servant, “No cocktails. It's Mr. Joe Temple. He likes our dry sherry. Take in a decanter of it. Old Meade Capron is with him. I don't know what Mr. Capron drinks.”

“Olo man Caplon likee whisky,” the Chinese cook announced. “Long time I savvy what he likee.”

James Lee smiled. “Take some bourbon in for Mr. Capron,” he said to the house boy.

Greeting James Lee, “I'm awfully glad to see you,” Joseph Temple declared. “I've got a tough problem for you. Capron will tell you all about it. Mr. Lee—Mr. Capron.”

To the elderly Mr. Capron, “I believe I told you that Lee and I were classmates at Yale,” Joseph Temple explained. “If any man can find a way out of this mess he can.”

IN THE library of James Lee's apartment, “First of all,” Joseph Temple began, “I've got a very serious charge to lay against young Warren Bayne. Do you know him?”

“I've met him. I can't say that I know him,” James Lee said. “You mean the young man who is to marry Miss Harwood—Louise

Harwood?"

"That's the man. Giddy young fool on the social trapeze."

Lee nodded. "Given to making long swings on the social trapeze from Hollywood to Del Monte to Burlingame to San Francisco."

"And all way points where the polo set do their heavy drinking," Temple added.

"What's he done?"

"He's done a lot of things in the past," Meade Capron suggested. "I knew his father. You can't blame the boy."

"Blame him for what?"

There was a moment's silence and then, "You know that we have some exceptional diamonds in the shop," Joseph Temple began. "A diamond from Temple and Peck—I sound like advertising copy. Bayne bought a stone from us a month ago. Sixteen thousand dollars. A square diamond. We mounted it in platinum. He gave it to Louise Harwood for an engagement ring. Peck tried to sell him a smaller stone but nothing would satisfy love's young dream except the sixteen-thousand-dollar piece. He paid us two thousand dollars. Peck gave him a two-year credit on the balance. That partner of mine is a fool. I'll let Meade Capron tell you the rest of the story."

The elderly Mr. Capron bathed his tonsils in a generous libation of thirty-year-old bourbon, coughed once and took the spotlight.

"It happens, Mr. Lee, that I am not unfamiliar with gem stones. Mr. Temple will tell you...."

"Capron knows emeralds," Joseph Temple interrupted. "He knows as much about emeralds as any man in the country. He knows enough about diamonds for our present purposes."

OLD MEADE CAPRON frowned for a moment at the limitations set upon the compliment and then, "I saw the square diamond the day after young Bayne gave it to Louise Harwood. I had seen it several times before. It is a distinguished stone. I saw Miss Harwood again yesterday evening at her mother's house. She was wearing the ring, but the square diamond had been replaced. Paste! The imitation would pass well enough with the average observer—under electric lights. I kept my counsel. You and Mr. Temple know of my discovery. No one else."

"Didn't you speak of the substitution to Miss Harwood?" James Lee queried.

"For obvious reasons I did not. I went so far as to suggest that the ring's romantic associations must impel her to wear it day and night."

At this point old Meade Capron snorted his opinion of the younger generation. “She assured me that its romantic value was zero. She confessed that she laid it aside with her other jewelry every night. More important—she told me that she had entrusted the stone to young Warren Bayne for two days. The ring was slightly large for her finger. She and Bayne and a dozen other wild young people had gone to Hollywood on a party with some movie people whom they met at Del Monte. She is...”

“Is Miss Harwood addicted to wild parties?”

Old Meade Capron fortified his spirit with another shot of bourbon before he permitted himself to answer. “She is the wildest girl in her set. She is...”

“That's not the point,” Joseph Temple interrupted. The jeweler, sticking close to his indictment of Warren Bayne, let the case against Louise Harwood rest in his eagerness to present the evidence against the young man. “Actually we're not much interested in the girl,” he said. “She's a wild young fool but Bayne is a wild young crook. He's a flashy ne'er-do-well. He never did a day's work in his life unless you call polo work. He's notoriously a heavy gambler and notoriously a loser. He has no income. He's always broke. He's been in trouble over his bank account a hundred times. He's marrying Louise Harwood for her money.”

“Her mother's money,” Meade Capron interposed.

“Her mother's money,” Joseph Temple admitted. “And now, needing cash, he virtually steals a diamond from the girl he's engaged to marry!”

James Lee's eyes narrowed. “That's a fairly strong statement.”

“I admit it. It can't be strong enough to...”

“You've left out the important fact,” Meade Capron interposed. “Tell Mr. Lee about Warren Bayne's bank account.”

Joseph Temple nodded violently. “The bank account! That's the whole story!” he exploded. “I was leading up to it. Listen to this! The day after Warren Bayne got back from the Hollywood orgy and got sobered up he deposited six thousand dollars in the West National. Was it a check? It was not! Was it a draft to his order? It was not! The money was in cash!” In his rage Joseph Temple glared at James Lee. “Cash that he got from some pawnbroker, some fence in payment for my diamond!”

“How did you learn about the six thousand?”

“Confidential information from the cashier of the West National. He's a friend of mine.”

James Lee waited for a moment and then: “I'd say your next move is to swear out a warrant for the young man. What do you want me to do?—unofficially. The Department of Justice isn't interested in such things.”

“Swear out a warrant!” Joseph Temple scowled in helpless rage. “Do you know what that means? We don't swear out warrants for the damned polo set. It would cost me fifty important customers—very important customers—the day the news was published.”

“I still fail to see where I draw any cards in this game.” Lee frowned at Joseph Temple. “What do you want me to do?”

“The case is clear enough against young Bayne. As long as you're professionally associated with crime and criminals you can settle this affair without any publicity. Get hold of Bayne and tell him for me that if he pays over the six thousand dollars that he has in the West National I will let the balance ride for a while. You can suggest that if he does not turn the six thousand over to us we will sock him with a warrant.”

After a moment, “It's thin material to high-jack a man with,” Lee suggested. “What else have you got on young Bayne? We need something more definite than your suspicions.”

With rising temper, “He's a rotter!” Mr. Temple exploded. “Notorious for his drunken parties. You can scare him with that mess he got into at Braga's gambling joint after the Stanford game. Louise Harwood and a dozen of her friends were in the party. If Braga's bartender had died it would have been manslaughter.”

Lee shook his head. “That's a little bit vague. Everybody gets into messes after football games. Help yourself to the sherry and cool off.”

Under the soothing influence of this third glass of sherry, “You'd better come home to dinner with me,” Mr. Temple said. “We can talk this out.”

“Thank you, not this evening. I'll stay here and do a little quiet thinking.”

Mr. Temple brightened. “You mean you'll work on this diamond job?”

James Lee nodded.

“Yes,” he said. “Please don't do anything... violent until you hear from me.”

WHEN his visitors had left, James Lee walked to the kitchen of his apartment. Facing his Chinese cook, “Do you know the servants in Mrs. Rockwell Harwood's house?” he asked.

“Missy Harwood cook long time my friend. He my cousin.”

“Mrs. Harwood's daughter has a big diamond ring. She is to marry young Mr. Warren Bayne. He gave her the ring.”

“I know him. Very wild boy, fight likee soldier.”

James Lee nodded in full agreement with his cook's opinion of Warren Bayne. “I want to see Miss Harwood's diamond. Ask your cousin to get hold of the ring. Tell him to bring it down here tonight.”

“Mebbe no can do.”

“Maybe can do. Try it.”

“If can do he ketchum....”

After he had enjoyed his dinner James Lee smoked a cigarette leisurely in the quiet of his library. When the cigarette was finished he put a call through the Chinatown Exchange, cackling a demand in Cantonese for a number that did not answer until central had rung three times.

To the reluctant “Hola” of a thin voice that answered him, “Put Chin Yut on the line,” James Lee demanded.

“Chin Yut long time go way.”

“This is James Lee speaking. Put Chin Yut on the line.”

“Chin Yut is speaking.”

“Come to my house at once.”

“I come now.” A click ended the evidence of Chin Yut's bending will.

Facing Chin Yut without further preliminary than a nod of greeting, “You are acquainted with the gambling house run by Braga Covilla?” James Lee asked.

For an instant a grimace of amusement distorted Chin Yut's cadaverous countenance. “Who is not?”

“He is still a customer of yours?”

When Chin Yut hesitated with his reply, “I have the records on Braga's purchases, complete,” James Lee added.

A mask of rage replaced the smile on Chin Yut's face. “I must kill a man or two in my employ,” he said.

“You have some good men in your employ. Answer me! Braga still buys opium from you?”

Chin Yut nodded his head. “You know that he does,” he said sullenly.

“How many smoking-rooms has he in his gambling house?”

“He has three rooms.”

“For white men?”

“For white men and white women,” Chin Yut answered. “He serves no others.”

“That's all,” James Lee said. “Chin Yut, your feet are on the pathway to hell.”

“That is evidently a secret known to the world. Good luck, long life.”

“Sons to mourn at your grave,” James Lee said, following the Ritual of Right Conduct. “Good night.”

When Chin Yut had left his apartment, James Lee summoned his house boy. “Mrs. Harwood's cook will probably come to see me tonight. Admit him instantly. I am going to sleep now. You stay awake.”

The genius of the kitchen in the Harwood home rang the bell of James Lee's apartment two hours after midnight.

The house boy ushered him into the library of the apartment. “My master will welcome you in one moment,” he said.

When he had greeted his visitor, “The daughter of your house is—careless with her treasures?” James Lee asked.

In answer the Harwood cook hauled a knotted silk handkerchief out of the depths of an inner pocket of his coat. “This is the ring,” he said.

When he had removed the silk covering from the ring James Lee observed the stone for a moment, flooding it with the strong greenish light of one of the reading lamps in the library. He turned to the house boy. “Serve our guest with whatever refreshments he may desire,” he ordered, and then to the Harwood cook, “If you will excuse me I will return in a few moments.”

In a long inside room of his apartment which had been fitted up as a laboratory James Lee devoted ten minutes to an accurately checked measurement of the refractive index of the stone in Louise Harwood's ring. Presently, averaging the six readings that he had made, confirming old Meade Capron's opinion of the stone, “Strass,” he decided. “One, point nine seven five.”

For a moment following his measurement of the refractive index of the false gem he considered making a test for its specific gravity. Then, “Difficult—and nothing much to be gained by it,” he decided. “We win or lose on one, point nine seven five.”

He returned to his library, where his guest awaited him. He handed

the ring to Mrs. Harwood's cook. “You have served me well. Let me know when I may express my gratitude more effectively,” he said. “A cup of wine?... Plenteous years.”

Choking slightly over the bourbon which he had selected in preference to the sherry on the library table, “Seven sons at thy grave,” the cook complimented.

“And silence.”

The cook bowed to James Lee. “A wise man understands a nod.”

When his visitor had gone James Lee went to bed without delay. “I shall want nothing more tonight,” he said to his house boy who stood waiting in his master's bedroom. “Breakfast at seven. I have a busy day planned for tomorrow. Call me at six-thirty.”

OF THE six facet-cutting machines in San Francisco two belonged to private owners and four to lapidaries who did commercial work. It was two o'clock in the afternoon before James Lee finished his interview with the man who operated the fourth of these commercial machines.

Returning to his apartment he telephoned a brief message to Louise Harwood. “I should like to have you call at my apartment,” he said. “This is James Lee, Department of Justice, speaking.”

After a moment, “I will come,” the girl faltered.

“At four o'clock?”

“At four o'clock.”

When he had given Louise Harwood his address James Lee hung up the telephone.

To his house boy a moment later, “A lady will call here to see me at four o'clock,” he said. “I will receive her in the library. In the meantime go down to the Twin Pigeon Jewelry Store—present my compliments to Moy Sam and tell him that I have need of his services this afternoon. Ask him to be here at four o'clock. Entertain him in your room until I summon him.”

Promptly at four o'clock, impelled by a growing fear of the threat that she had read into James Lee's invitation, Louise Harwood rang the bell of Lee's apartment.

Greeting Louise Harwood, “First of all, let me assure you that you will not regret this visit,” James Lee said to the frightened girl. “You are unhappy now. On my word of honor you will leave here presently with your heart lightened of its burden—and with your Braga problem solved. The opium...”

“I did not smoke any opium....”

James Lee lifted his hand. “I know that,” he said. “I also know the names of your three companions who did—three young ladies. They were prompted by the mystery and the novelty of the thing, no doubt—but one of them is by way of becoming an addict now.”

The look of surprise on Louise Harwood's face gave way to horror.

“Do you mean that she...”

Interrupting the girl, “She has will enough to save herself.”

After a moment of silence, “I should like to have you come into my laboratory for a little while.”

From an open box that sat on a table against the west wall of his laboratory James Lee lifted out a handful of glittering crystals. “Here is a beautiful piece of amethyst,” he said, holding a purple crystal to the light. “And some rose quartz.... These are emeralds. Beautiful enough but of no value.... This is a piece of glass. Do you remember from your school days how these things are identified—their relative hardness, their specific gravity, their varying abilities to bend a ray of light? This beautiful substance is glass—do you see how its prisms break up the light into the spectrum colors? What a pure blue!... Have you ever seen a ray of sunlight after it has been passed through a prism?”

“We had a lot of those things in school,” Louise Harwood said. “I didn't pay much attention to them.”

James Lee smiled. “A ray of sunlight is not very interesting when one is—in school.” He turned the prismatic piece of glass in his hand until one of its facets glowed with a brilliant orange light. “This is a very beautiful gem,” he said. “Worth a dollar of any debased currency. I will show you how we determine its refractive index.... See, I fix it in this machine and now through this prismatic section of the stone I direct... this pencil of light.... This is a beautiful machine. Reading direct... and we read on the scale one, point nine seven five. That is the refractive index of this glass. It is, by the way, the heaviest flint glass that I have ever seen. Here is a crystal of quartz. It is much harder than glass but its refractive index is considerably less than the glass we have just tested.... Do you find that this pastime bores you?”

THE girl smiled a thin smile. “It is all very interesting,” she said languidly.

“It will become more interesting perhaps,” James Lee suggested. From a closed drawer to his right he removed another complex, glittering crystal. “This is another substance—pure carbon. The glass was principally silica and potash and lead. The refractive index of this

carbon crystal is much higher than the glass. You see it reads around two, point four two—a little less perhaps. This stone is called a diamond. The origin of the word is lost in antiquity. The Arabs and the Greeks and Romans had it 'adamas'—unconquerable. This is a very beautiful stone, by the way. Strangely enough it seems to be a replica of the stone you are wearing. May I see your ring a moment?"

Louise Harwood held her hand out toward James Lee. "I can't get it off my finger. The ring is too small."

"Perhaps if we moistened your finger with a drop of glycerine.... There. Now it comes off. Now let us fix it in this machine and... That's surprising, isn't it? The glass in your ring has the same refractive index as the lead glass we examined a few moments ago. What a coincidence. One, point nine seven five. It is really a first-rate imitation of a diamond. I suppose you leave your real jewels in the safe-deposit vaults?"

"It's the safest way," the girl faltered inanely.

"Quite." James Lee nodded in quick agreement to this and then, "Isn't it strange that the difference in value between this diamond here in front of you and that piece of glass in your ring should be fifteen or twenty thousand dollars? Certainly the price of a diamond is no index of its beauty.... But wouldn't you rather have this real diamond than that piece of glass? It's a marvelous gem."

Without waiting for the girl to reply James Lee called abruptly to his house boy: "Please tell Moy Sam to come in here a moment."

When the Chinese jeweler stood before him, James Lee handed him Louise Harwood's ring. "Take that piece of glass out of the ring," he directed. "Substitute this diamond in place of it. You will find that the setting fits the diamond."

Lee turned to the girl quickly and held out an open cigarette case. "Have a cigarette," he said. "Enjoy the rich blessing of tobacco while Moy Sam does his work. He is very skillful.... See there, how perfectly the diamond fits your ring?"

Three minutes later when Louise Harwood had returned the ring to her finger and when they were again alone, "You may cry now for sixty seconds," James Lee suggested to her.

Presently, after the girl had devoted something more than sixty seconds to her tears, James Lee picked up the glass crystal that Moy Sam had taken from the ring. "Strangely enough," he said, "Braga Covilla gave the order for the manufacture of that imitation of your diamond. I found the man who cut this piece of glass—and he named his customer. I pried the story and the diamond out of Braga on the strength of what I know about his opium business. Let me wrap that

glass gem up for you. Take it with you for good luck."

James Lee reached for a blue slip of paper that lay in the drawer of his work table. He held the slip of paper toward Louise Harwood. "You have seen this before? It is the check that you gave Braga the afternoon you entertained so lavishly—and lost so heavily at roulette. Here, I will wrap your glass gem in it—and that makes your souvenir of this visit to my house complete."

Now for twice sixty seconds the girl's voice came through incoherent sobs. When she was quieter, "I did not know—the penalty—for forgery—until Braga spoke of the penitentiary. He threatened me. I gave him the diamond. Overdrafts were nothing. I always got money from Mother. I'd lost a lot of money at roulette and I was full of cocktails."

"Not a very good defense when a blackmailer is after you," James Lee interrupted. "May I offer you a glass of sherry?... Let us sink this whole affair out of memory. Braga will keep his mouth shut. I forget easily and completely." To his conscience, "Once more I have compounded a felony!"

James Lee lifted his glass of wine toward Louise Harwood. "I wish you a happy wedding and a happy honeymoon with Mr. Warren Bayne."

Through her quiet tears, "You have made it possible for life to be happy for me," the girl whispered. "I cannot express my gratitude, Mr. Lee—and oh, I'll never forget how darned wonderful you've been."

AFTER Louise Harwood had left his apartment, James Lee rang through on the telephone for Joseph Temple. "I've made a little progress," he reported when Mr. Temple answered.

"I knew you would! Is that rascal going to turn over the six thousand dollars to us?"

"I'd go easy on the 'that rascal' as you call him. The six thousand is his commission on the sale of a Monterey ranch that he induced one of his big-shot movie friends to buy. He's going to spend it all on his honeymoon trip. You'd better lay off the six thousand."

"But what about the diamond?"

"Miss Harwood is wearing the diamond," James Lee announced. "If I were you I'd advise old Meade Capron to have his eyes examined."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure. The lights in the Harwood house may have deceived Mr. Capron. You never can tell what a ray of light will do. Maybe any engagement ring looks phony to a man as old as Meade

Capron.”

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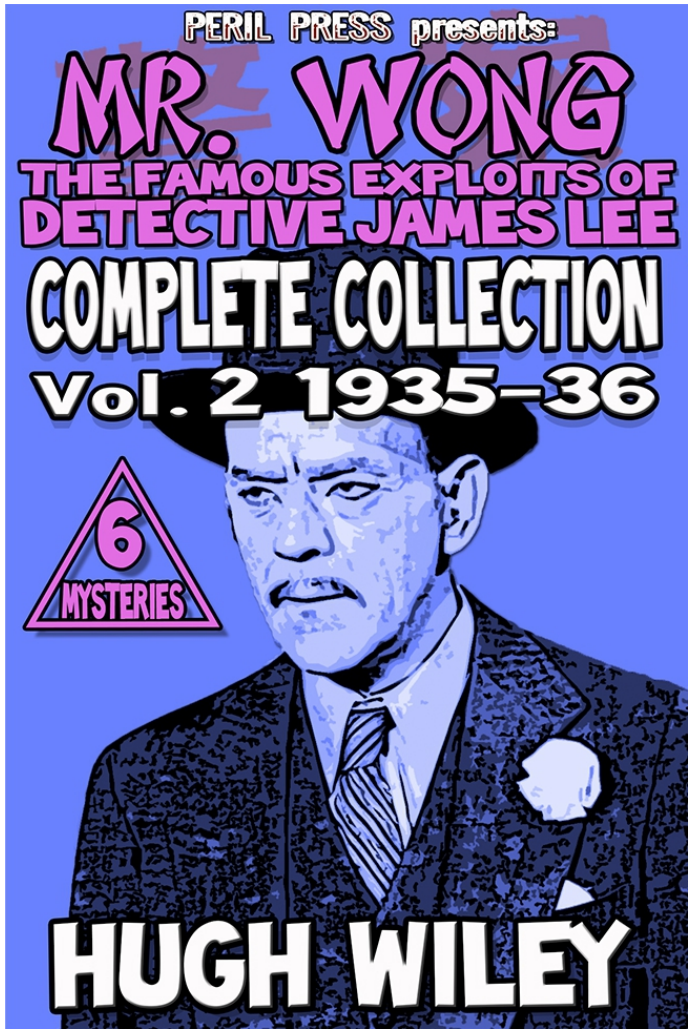
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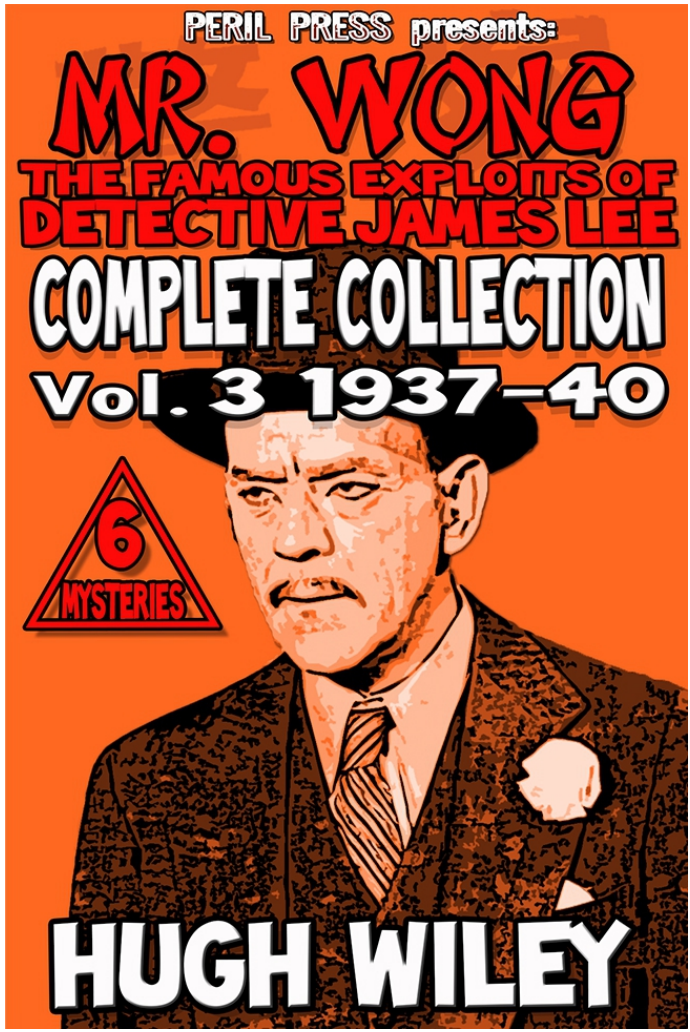
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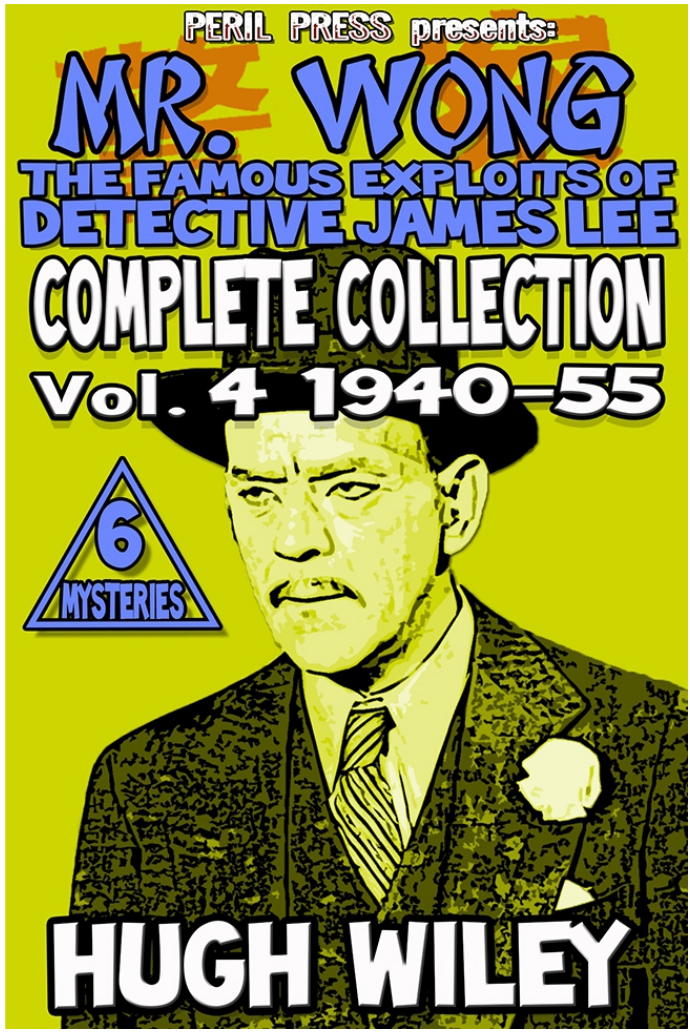
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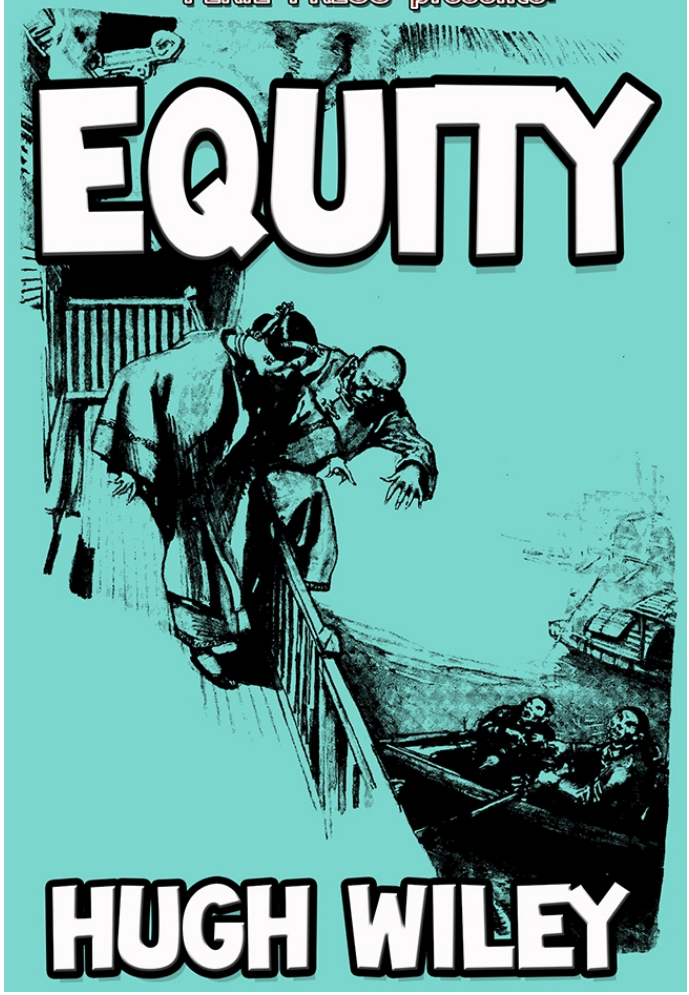

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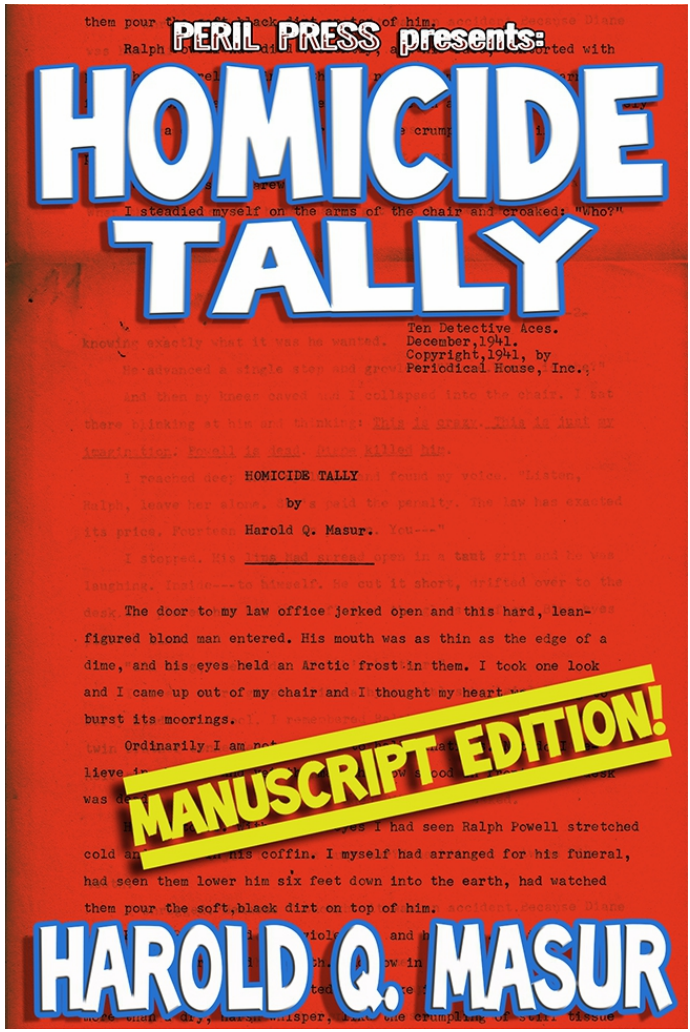
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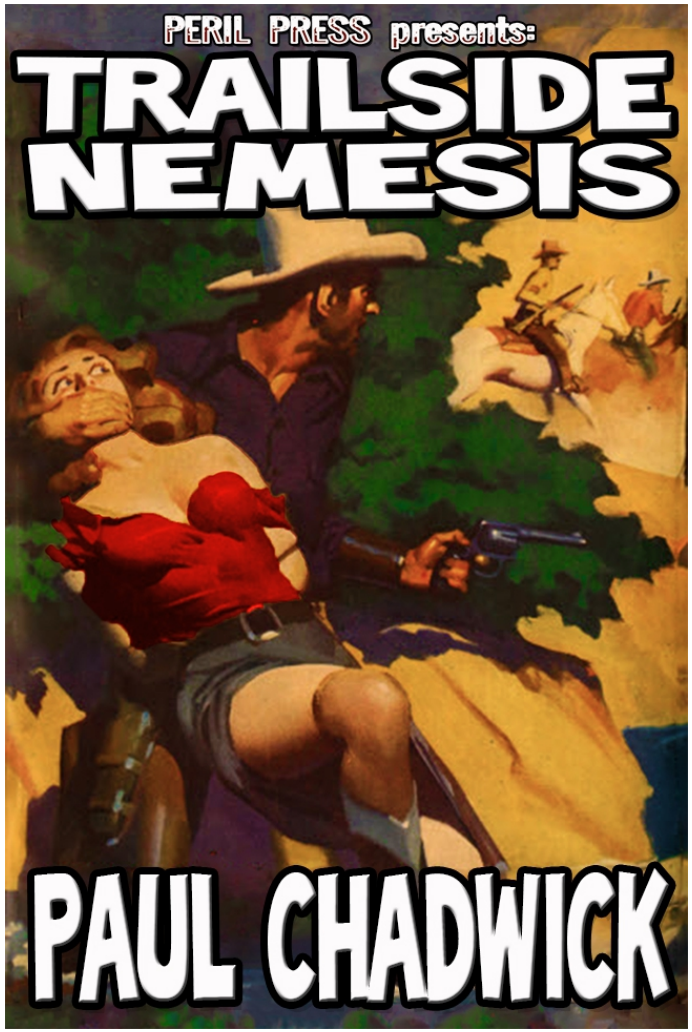
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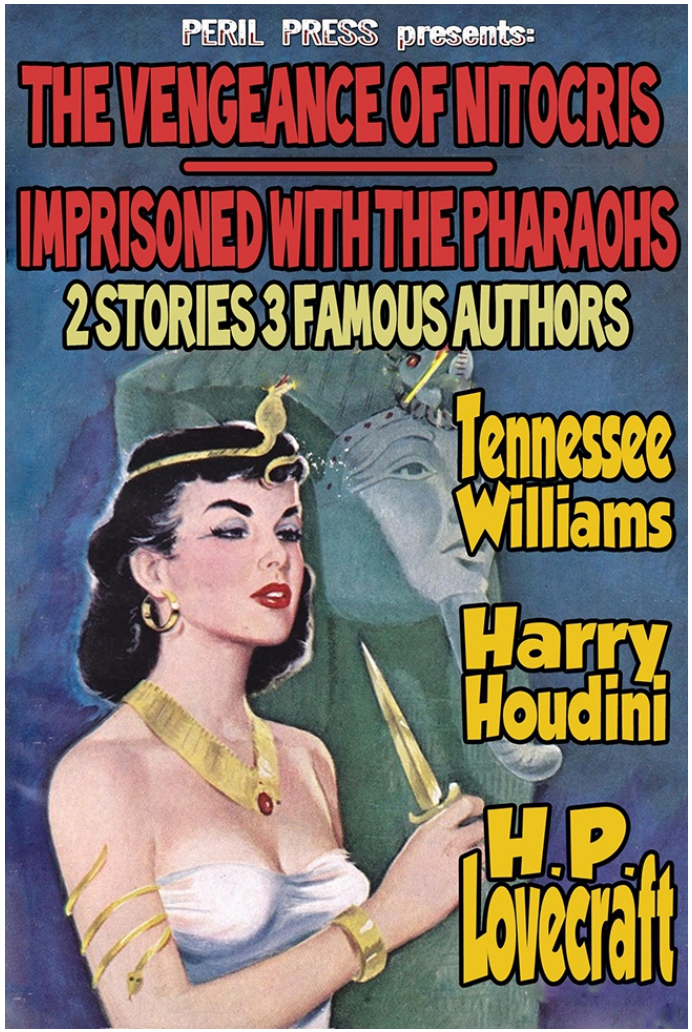
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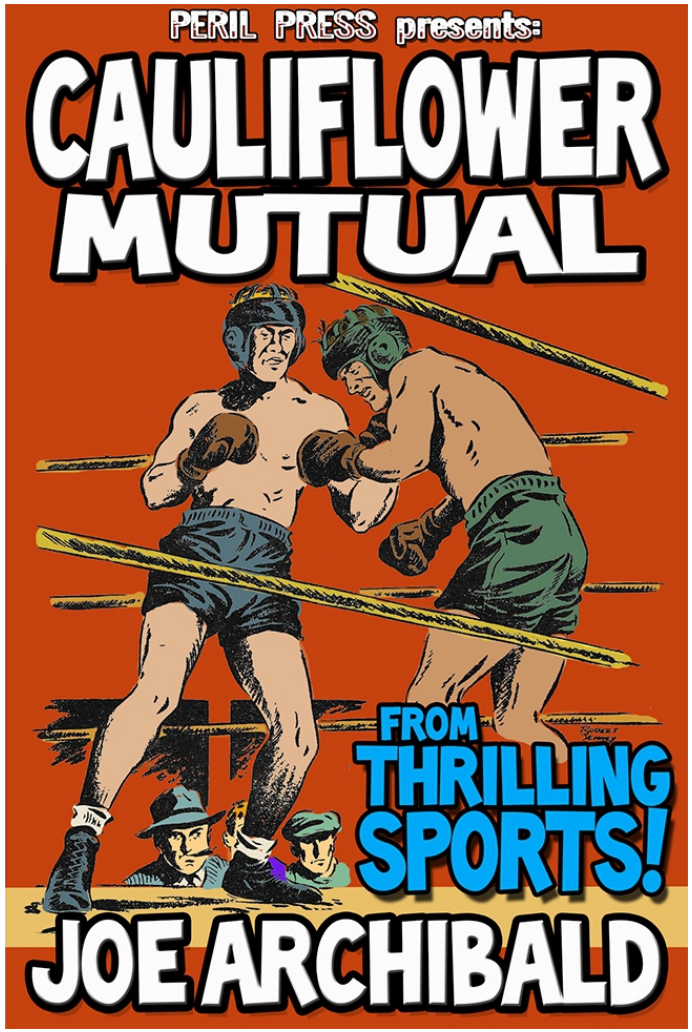
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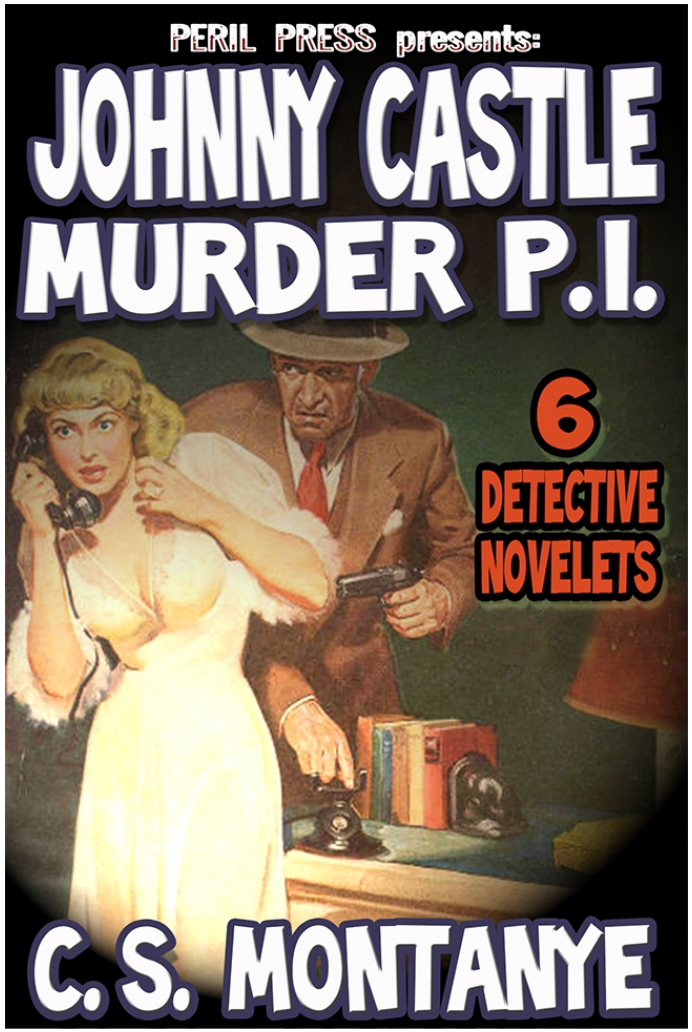
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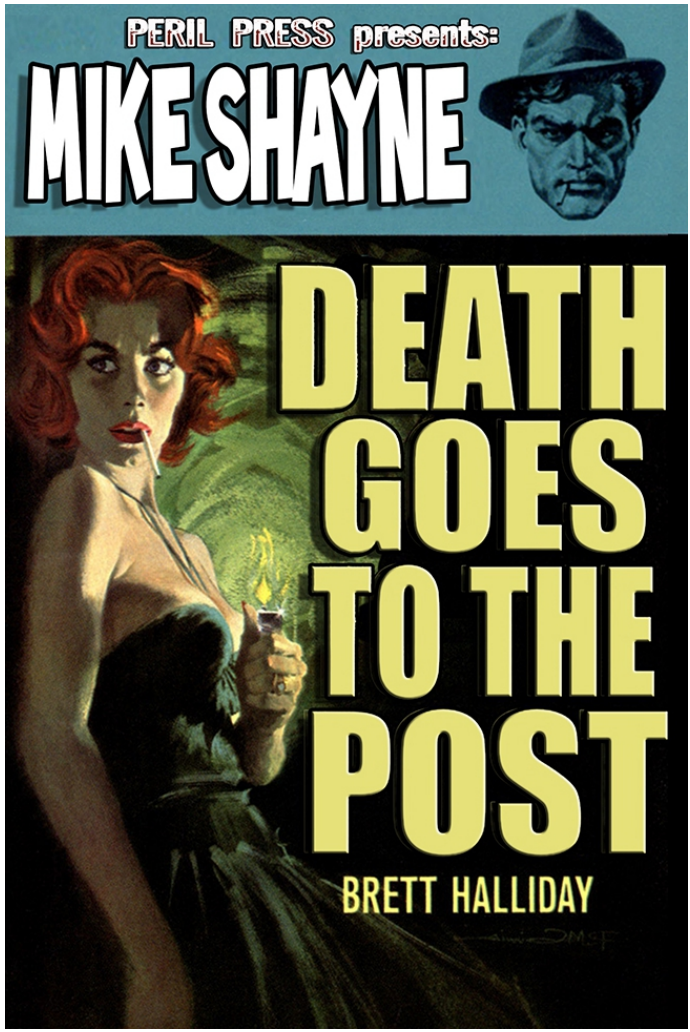
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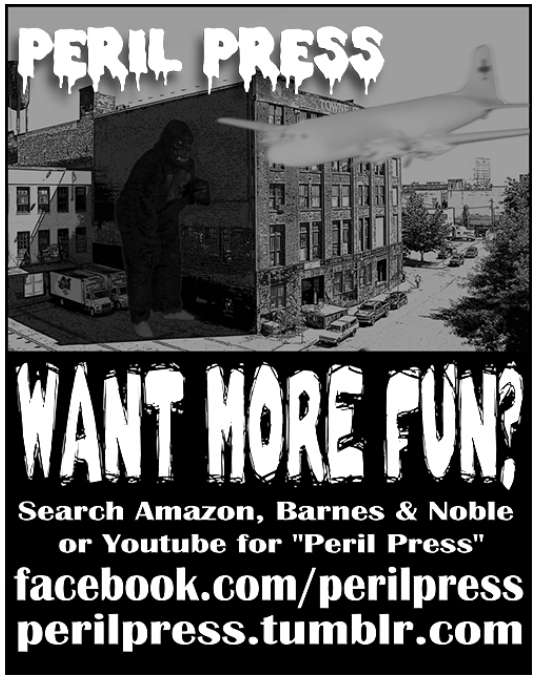
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